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THE PRICE OF FAME

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(BARONESS MUMM VON SCHWARZENSTEIN)

I.

JOE MONROE and his wife belonged to that typically New England class of old-time respectability which bears upon its face the ostentatious self-satisfaction engendered by an existence of frugal routine. Considerably past middle age, they had enjoyed conjugal life for over thirty years on the wide-acred estate that had been in the family for many generations. The name, Monroe, was well known and respected in the county, for Joseph, the elder, a lawyer of high standing in Bridgeport, had boasted quite a degree of prominence among its people. The present Joseph, however, although heir to the firm, yet mild, character of his worthy progenitor, lacked his ability, being controlled more by his heart than his head, as palmists say.

It was upon her knowledge of this fact that Mrs. Monroe often depended, with cunning confidence, for the ultimate success of attacks planned in behalf of her second and best-beloved son, Herbert, whose life, as Sidney Smith said of his own, was passed "like a razor, continually in hot water or a scrape." Upon Herbert his doting parents had settled their ambitions, because of a certain domineering self-assertiveness that he had evinced in childhood, and which, in their innocent adulation, they had interpreted as cleverness. Money was scraped and saved during his precocious boyhood to enable him to take the course at Yale, where he studied electric engineering. It was hoped that he might through this pursuit become a great inventor, or at least a power in the world of science.

Sam, his brother, and elder by one year,—a taciturn, loosely jointed fellow of twenty at the time,—made no comment upon these proceed-

ings, although his limited education had been begun and finished in the public high-school of Bridgeport. He felt it just to give Herbert all advantages, having been reared to a full appreciation of his brother's superiority, and therefore made no objection to his having them, even at the cost of his own labor in superintending the farm. During the years of Herbert's absence he slaved silently, having the tale of his brother's prospective glory dinned forever in his ears as an incentive to work.

But after a time the story began to pall. It was Herbert, Herbert, on every side: and Mrs. Mortimer's daughter Helen, who lived on the adjoining place, never seemed to open her lips if it were not to speak of him. Helen Mortimer was five years younger than Sam, and in his quiet way he had watched her growing from a mere child, like some sweet, familiar flower of his garden. In time the tendrils of her influence penetrated into the deep, fallow ground of his nature. He felt them as the earth must feel the virtue-imbibing roots of its growth, offering to her secret influence a silent sacrifice of all that was best in him. He thought of her only as a thing to love, an incentive towards virtue and pure-mindedness; for he realized there could be no hope of her ever turning her thoughts from Herbert to him.

Things continued like this during the three years of Herbert's course at college; then occurred one of the first disappointments of that auspicious venture. Herbert returned home with vastly increased self-esteem and an outward polish, offset by inexcusable debt, and minus diploma and honors. Of course, it was a great blow to the family, and it became immediately necessary to sell part of the farm's stock and some of the land to cancel the prodigal's obligations. But the fellow had a way which was irresistible; he was adorably good-looking, and had made such good friends in the fashionable world that he soon accomplished a reconciliation with his parents and Sam—the latter readily forgiving without a murmur.

"You see, you good people have all spoiled me," Herbert would say, with his bright smile; "you've expected too much. I am not a Napoleon or a Frederick the Great; I'm only a son of my dear old Mamsey." And with that he would give Mrs. Monroe a hug that brought a crimson flush to her round, genial face. Mr. Monroe would cross his legs nervously with a glance of pride at his handsome son, whose cultured tone and seeming fluent knowledge made his guileless old heart swell with pleasure.

Herbert did not remain long at home; he was invited by a college friend, who had taken a fancy to him, to spend the winter in New York. To be the guest of Bobby Featherstone was not a matter to be sniffed at, and the Monroes recognized that such an opportunity might open wonderful possibilities to their beloved son. Bobby was not only

a millionaire in his own right, but held considerable sway as a rapid young sprig of that ostentatiously vicious community known as the "smart set" of the metropolis. Of course, the Monroes knew nothing of this; they were informed merely that he held power and an enviable position in the great city of New York.

One week spent in the peaceful atmosphere of his people's home was sufficient for Herbert. Helen's correct but unadorned beauty did not appeal to him; her shy and innocently revealed adoration bored him. He even secretly wondered at the irony of fate that had given him her love when the girl was so clearly suited to Sam.

Although Mr. Monroe was far from pleased by the little profit Herbert had made of his time at college and the sums expended upon him, he was easily persuaded to believe in the advisability of his son visiting Featherstone. Herbert explained it as merely a stepping-stone to great things that would ultimately add to the fortunes of all; and with this Sam heartily agreed, recognizing from his brother's very tone of voice that it would not be right to keep him in that provincial spot. Herbert always chose the most elegant language in speaking to his parents, the learnedness of which invariably silenced them; and they jogged along, still husbanding their ambitions for his future as the key-note of their existence.

Helen, who from early childhood had made Herbert her idol, was the only one who could not accept the thought of his departure with entire confidence and bravery. Her love was a secret she scarcely dared to acknowledge even to herself; and yet the thought that this long-looked-for return brought him for so short a time into her life stole the brightness from her lovely face.

Only Sam guessed what she suffered, for, long before even his brother had recognized the truth, his keen observation had detected her jealously guarded secret.

Mrs. Monroe was very fond of the girl, and often had her over to spend the day, especially when her idolized son returned for his vacations, to brighten and enliven the old house, entirely ignoring the probable consequence of such association.

Helen had a pretty voice, and was wont to sit at the old piano in the wide parlor, with its horse-hair furniture and large-framed family portraits, and sing simple little songs that pleased the old people and went straight to Sam's heart. Herbert always praised her in his gallant way, although the natural simplicity of her method invariably worked on his nerves, for, unlike the others, he had been accustomed to hear cultured singers during his days at Yale.

One evening, three days before his departure for New York, while Helen was singing "Ben Bolt" she glanced up as he stood leaning gracefully against the piano and surprised a half-contemptuous smile in his eyes.

Instantly her voice broke; she was unable to continue. On recognizing what he had done, Herbert was sorry, although the incident secretly amused him.

"Why did you stop singing so suddenly to-night?" he asked later, as he drove her through the dusk to the Mortimers' place.

"Because—you were laughing," she returned softly.

"Laughing? What nonsense! My dear little girl, I love to hear you sing."

Helen could make no response; already her heart was full almost to breaking at the thought of his approaching departure, and these gentle words threatened to set free an avalanche of tears. She sank farther back in the buggy and remained silent, hearing her heart beat loudly and fearing that he too might notice it.

Herbert felt the shy movement, and, comprehending the significance of her silence, drew the horse to a walk.

"Are you offended with me?" he asked in the tone of tender appeal he knew so well how to employ.

"No." The word was scarcely audible, and he could hear her quickly drawn breath as she sought to conceal the emotion that was slowly getting mastery of her.

In a moment he had her small, quivering hand in his. "What a funny child you are!" he murmured, fixing his fine eyes upon her. Helen turned away in confusion; he could see the delicate flush steal up her slender throat and dye the little ear from which her soft, wavy hair was brushed back in such conventional sleekness. "Are you sorry to have me go?"

She raised her hand frantically to escape his hold, feeling the tears rush suddenly to her eyes, but he held it firmly, drawing her closer to him. "Tell me, are you sorry?"

Feeling that embrace about her for which she had secretly longed during the months of his absence, Helen grew faint. She sank to it weakly, helplessly; and, burying her face on his shoulder, sobbed like a child.

Herbert had not been prepared for this: although during his college days he had had varied experience with young women, he had never before seen one in tears. For an instant it bewildered him. Helen was so unlike the girls he had known while at Yale that he had always instinctively treated her with a sort of contemptuous reverence, but as he now comprehended how yielding she clung to him in the helpless confidence of her innocent love, a thrill of youthful excitement prompted him to gather her closer in his embrace.

"Kiss me," he whispered, "if you love me."

They heard the sleepy creaking of the buggy moving slowly through the soft-scented twilight, and the subtle perfumes of spring entered their senses with insidious influence.

Under the soft and sensuous excitement of the hour Herbert's self-indulgent nature awoke suddenly to a keen, though superficial, delight in feeling her quivering and submissive in his arms. His brain reeled: he gently pressed back her tossed head until he could see the tearful gray eyes brilliant with a love she dared not speak, the lips parted by frightened breathing, the soft face flushed with the first glow of love.

As his lips met hers an unworthy thought was born of the moment's intoxication. Why had he so long ignored her too evident adoration? There were yet three days—it would relieve the monotony!

"Herb, don't leave me," she whispered breathlessly as he kissed her again, "I can't bear it; I shall die here without you!"

Her eyes looked into his with yearning trust, and something in them, some evidence of her innocent heart, awoke in him the innate nobility that his pampered and selfish existence had not yet wholly extinguished. There came to him a revulsion of feeling; he sat upright and released her.

"I must, worse luck!" he said, patting the little hand that still clung to his. "But I'll come back—never fear; and then we shall have a great time."

"But when—when?" she pleaded.

"Oh, before long." He did not for a moment appreciate that he had done the girl any harm in that momentary indulgence of himself, but the reaction embarrassed him. He was at a loss how to act in order to quiet her, to make her realize that he had meant nothing.

Helen could not realize this: the evil was done. In taking her virgin kisses he had in a sense taken possession of her. In that first delicious hour of her life her spirit had voluntarily submitted to his proprietorship, although he had not consciously exerted it.

To do him justice, Herbert was sincerely regretful of the episode after he had disengaged himself from her tenderly clinging hands at her aunt's gate. The fascinating artificiality and subtlety of city-bred girls had spoiled him for one so fresh and real as Helen. Her unconcealed devotion for him was not alluring; he preferred the coquettish playing of more worldly women. Everything provincial vexed him; he hungered for excitement and sensations, and by his wonderful stories of life in the big cities he had already conveyed to Helen's impressionable nature a little of this hunger.

It was in dreaming of him continually in connection with that life of which she knew so little that she had come to invest him with the glamour of romantic perfections. Her imaginative temperament had fallen a prey not alone to his beauty, but to the atmosphere of a broader and brighter world that he seemed to carry about with him.

His conversation, his manners, his dress, were all so different to those of the men who lived in her vicinity; they excited her fancy, and represented something for which her nature had craved since first she could remember.

She did not see him alone again during the three remaining days of his stay at the homestead, but on the eve of departure his vanity, perhaps as much as any desire to make up for his obvious neglect, led him to give her a small gold coin as a souvenir to keep her interests alive in him.

They had all gone to Bridgeport to see him off, she and his mother and father and Sam, and this little occurrence had taken place in the big, three-seated wagonette, while she and Herbert sat together in the rear.

He spoke some honeyed words to her too, words born of previous flirtations and empty as they were subtly sweet; but Helen drank them in greedily and treasured them in her heart.

For many weeks she awaited trustingly for the coming of a letter, confiding her secret to no one, and existing in a sweet fool's paradise of dreams.

In time she was obliged, however, to be grateful for the rare news of Herbert that came in occasional letters to his parents,—beautifully worded and penned epistles, glowing with accounts of how he was fêted and sought after, and the wonderful possibilities that the opportunity offered for his future. These letters were a source of interest to the community for miles around, for Mrs. Monroe took especial delight in recounting to members of that rural and simple-minded aristocracy all that her beloved son was seeing and doing in the great metropolis,—how he visited at this house and that, how Mrs. Van Pilpher had taken him in her carriage to the opera, and the wealthy Mrs. Struthers had asked him to officiate as usher at the wedding of her daughter. The rural aristocracy received these enthusiastic bulletins with unbending reserve, but they nevertheless enjoyed them.

II.

MEANWHILE Herbert in the glittering whirl of his new life was slowly and surely getting into serious difficulties. Robert Featherstone, although he could not look back farther than two generations with an unblushing countenance, was a young man of heart, and that keenness of calculation which is one of the legacies bequeathed by plebeian and commercial ancestry. He had ambitions for his friend, and, founding his expectations upon Herbert's unusually attractive personality, had set upon his making a brilliant marriage that would enable him to become a stable member of Bobby's "set" and remain in New York. But, unfortunately, his guest had not so strong a head

as he had appetites. The flattery of older women who were pleased to have so goodly a specimen of man to grace their board and box had had the effect it usually has upon innately vain natures who are plunged suddenly into a sea of excitement and adulation. Herbert never stopped to think of the morrow; he lived in the present, abandoning himself to the pleasures it offered recklessly, and heedless of consequence.

The thought of his parents and their loving expectations of his future never entered his head, save when it was necessary to invent some new and plausible excuse for requesting funds. Of Helen he never thought.

Bobby Featherstone had attempted to reason with him, all to no avail. He ended by refusing to loan him more money unless he made some effort to win Ethel Vanderstein, the daughter of an aged Croesus, whom Featherstone had selected for him. She was a pretty, dark girl of slightly Jewish type, and had already evinced a decided predilection for Herbert. Featherstone entertained her lavishly in order to bring the two together.

In the beginning Herbert espoused the idea bravely, although he was not particularly attracted by Miss Vanderstein; but this, Featherstone assured him, was unnecessary.

"It isn't considered the correct thing to love one's wife nowadays," he had replied to Herbert's hinted objection. "Who does in our world? You can't name one man, who has been married a year."

"I know," said Herbert thoughtfully, "but it seems to be a pretty rank condition of affairs."

"Oh, I know what's troubling you!" ejaculated Featherstone irritably. "You've been fool enough to let Mrs. Burton fascinate you, and now you're going to let her make a fool of you."

Herbert was standing by the window of his friend's luxurious bachelor apartments, looking moodily down upon the restless sea of Fifth Avenue; he made no response, but his brows contracted angrily.

"You are the most hopelessly thankless creature to push along!" continued his friend with still greater show of ill-humor. "Look at me! If it hadn't been that I took advantage of every opportunity that was offered, do you think I would be where I am to-day?"

Herbert wheeled about. "What rot!" he ejaculated. "You, with nearly five millions back of you! Compare your position with mine!"

"Oh, that's all very well, but four or five millions counts for mighty little with the set I move in. It got me in—I don't deny it; but that doesn't prove it will keep me there—not by a long shot! We are just as much slaves to our principles—or lack of principles—as any dry-goods clerk. In whatever station you're in, Monroe, whether low or high, you're obliged to obey the rules that control it. As somebody has said, 'even Hell hath its peculiar laws.'"

"Yes, and even fools have their philosophy!" returned Herbert with an insolent smile as he stretched himself in a low chair and lighted a cigarette.

"The fool is he who doesn't recognize a plum when it drops in his mouth, and I would advise you, my boy, to wake up before it is too late."

Something stilted in the speaker's tone made Herbert look up; he took the cigarette from his lips.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"I mean if you don't stop wasting your time running after Mrs. Burton, I'll wash my hands of you."

"What about Mrs. Jack?" demanded Herbert with a sneer.

"Pooh! a pastime. You don't suppose I'm making an idiot of myself over her, do you? Besides, she has a husband, and consequently the situation is safe. Although I don't think Estelle Burton would ever give you any serious trouble on that score. Young and pretty widows with little money are not looking for young and pretty boys without it, I can tell you. Besides, as you say, our situations are entirely different: I can afford to waste time; you can't."

Herbert puffed silently, his face expressing the ugly mood that was slowly getting possession of him.

"How do you expect this affair to end, I'd like to know," persisted Featherstone, goaded by his silence. "You will lose all your chances, then you will wake up to the ass you've been."

"Look here, Featherstone, I think you've preached enough for one day," said Herbert, with difficulty controlling his anger, not wishing to quarrel with his bread and butter if it could be avoided. "Suppose you dry up for a little while."

"I'm getting tired of talking to you," growled Featherstone ominously. "I know what it's coming to; Mrs. Burton is the very worst influence in the world for you; she would sacrifice any fellow for her own amusement."

"I would rather not discuss her, please," replied Herbert coldly. "I'm sick of these Sunday-school lectures, anyhow."

He got up and took his hat from the table. Featherstone watched him. "Are you going out?" he asked.

"Yes, I am not going to listen to this sort of thing any longer, that's certain."

"Well, don't forget I'm giving that dinner at Sherry's to-night for Miss Vanderstein; so be here in time to go with me, will you?"

"Oh, I shall be in time," returned Herbert wearily as he strode out of the room. He dreaded that dinner, with its interminable formality and, to him, uninteresting object. Ethel Vanderstein did not appeal to him in the slightest degree,—in fact, her personality was

somewhat repellent. Yet he felt that Featherstone's arguments were laid on a basis of truth, and that he expected him to propose that very evening, and had so arranged matters that he would be afforded an opportunity to do so.

As he strolled slowly up the broad avenue with its rush of vehicles and ceaseless tide of well-dressed pedestrians he turned the situation over and over in his mind. Would he marry her?—could he?

Immediately his thoughts reverted to the face that always haunted it, a small, high-cheeked, narrow-eyed face with a witchery of its own that was never seen in woman's face before. He recalled many of the Widow's characteristic little gestures, the subtle half-closing of her eyes, and an uncontrollable desire seized him to see her again.

He would propose to Ethel Vanderstein that evening; there was nothing else for him to do if he wished to keep in with Featherstone, but he meant to see Mrs. Burton for a little while first.

In his heart he recognized the logic in what his friend had said, although he would not acknowledge it even to himself. Estelle Burton certainly had acquired a peculiar and wholly controlling influence over him; her smallest wish was law; he felt her slightest change of mood as instantly and acutely as a photographic film feels difference in light and shade. He feared to contemplate to what an extent she might govern him, and yet the very fact that she possessed the power was a secret and ecstatic delight.

He turned into Forty-fifth Street and mounted the steps of her house.

The butler showed him into a back room luxuriously fitted up as a library. Mrs. Burton was seated at the desk, apparently very much occupied in writing a letter. She did not look up.

"Sit down, Herbert," she said gently in a soft voice of indescribable charm, and possessing a rich, flute-like quality that seemed peculiarly in harmony with her slight, willowy person and the tasteful accoutrements of the room, "I shall be finished in a moment."

He threw himself familiarly upon a divan back of her, and allowed his eyes to follow the graceful lines of her beautiful form, and linger upon the soft, waving, dark hair that adorned her shapely head in luxuriant, glossy masses.

Every sudden movement of her arm or hand sent a thrill through him, as though she had touched him. He was impatient to have her turn, that he might look into her strange, unwavering gray eyes, and feel her attention fixed upon him.

Suddenly she arose and, without even glancing at him, crossed to the electric bell.

"Send this by messenger at once, Motley," she said as the butler appeared, and handing him the letter.

When she turned towards him Herbert was standing.

"I have just dispatched a regret to the much-heralded Burk-Vanhesser dinner," she said as she stood, with arms uplifted, before a tall French mirror, arranging a stray bit of hair.

"Why, I thought it was to be to-night," remarked Herbert in surprise, as he regarded the supple lines of her form, boldly revealed by the pose.

"So it is; I have sent a plea of illness. It has finished me with that house, probably, but there was nothing else to do!"

"Did you not wish to go?"

She sank upon the divan with a troubled look in her eyes. "There is to be someone there I could not possibly permit myself to meet. It was only by a most fortunate chance that I learned he is to be there."

A violent and jealous curiosity seized Herbert; he began to imagine all sorts of situations in her past that could render such an aversion possible.

"Some man?" he said awkwardly. "Why should you fear to meet any man?"

She regarded him an instant in cold silence. "May I ask who has given you permission to catechise me?" she asked with the rigorous severity women of her type are wont to exercise over men who have once shown themselves to be abject to their wills.

His eyes shifted before hers.

"You know what madness you breed in me when you mention any other man having a place—even a contemptible one—in your life."

"Well, you must get over that," she returned quietly; "even a woman's husband can't be so exacting in these days."

"I love you as no woman's husband has ever loved her."

Mrs. Burton smiled. "Very probably; that is saying little. The first thing a husband learns is that his wife is but an ordinary woman, and wonders why he tied himself to her."

"Your husband never learned that."

She arose precipitantly. "No," she said bitterly, "he didn't find me quite ordinary enough! He thought—but why talk of him? I have a dull evening on my hands,—a new experience! You must amuse me."

Herbert's heart leapt as he met her splendid eyes fixed upon him, half smiling and half challenging.

"If only I could," he murmured emotionally, "but when a fellow gets to my state he's such a dull dog."

"Well, we shall have dinner early. You will feel better after dinner. We must dine here, for no one else must know that I am not as ill as I pretended in my note."

The thought of dining with her alone, of having her all to himself

the whole evening, made his brain reel. It was a privilege seldom accorded him, and one he would almost rather have died than forego. As he was about to make an enthusiastic reply, he remembered Featherstone's dinner at Sherry's. A chilling disappointment prevented the words; he turned and paced the room with head bowed and brows contracted.

The Widow watched him. "Well, is this the way to receive the most flattering invitation I have ever extended to you?" she asked in a somewhat puzzled tone.

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Herbert passionately. "It's just my luck!"

She turned on him coldly. "What is your luck?"

"Why, to have you ask me to do this to-night of all nights."

"Why?"

"Featherstone is giving a dinner; I promised to be there."

Mrs. Burton regarded him in significant silence.

"If you prefer to go to him," she said quietly, "go by all means. I shall send around for Dick Brockly—no, his wife is suffering from one of her bilious attacks; she looked as yellow as a duck's foot this morning! I couldn't stand Rogers, and there's no one else I can trust to know I am not ill. You will just have to stay, that is all!" She sank on the divan and with languid ease arranged a pyramid of cushions back of her.

"If it were not that he has asked this girl especially for me," said Herbert, still pacing restlessly.

"Oh, a girl!" murmured the Widow expressively; "now we have come to the pith of the matter. So you fear to offend this girl by remaining with me?"

"No—not in the least. I don't want to offend Featherstone. It will finish things between us if I don't turn up."

"Is Mr. Featherstone's opinion of such value? Pray, don't think of remaining if it means more to you than mine."

Herbert could not tell her all that it meant to him; he did not even dare to contemplate what the consequence was likely to be should he give way to the temptation she offered. It was only through Bobby Featherstone's patronage that he had been able to enter the set in which Mrs. Burton moved, and he knew that should he be thrown off by him without money and homeless, he would soon sink into oblivion.

"I don't know how I can manage it," he said in a vacillating tone. "They will expect me—it's rather late——"

"Send him a note. There are writing-things at that desk. A messenger can take it to him in ten minutes."

"If he knows I am here——"

"Why let him know? Say you have—broken your foot—been given

knockout drops—say you're dead!" She laughed wickedly, and sank deeper into the cushions.

Herbert looked at her lying back with supple grace, her lovely face smiling up at him with bewitching deviltry, her strange eyes half-closed and alluring.

"All right, here goes!" he exclaimed recklessly as he strode towards the desk.

III.

WHEN Herbert returned that night Featherstone was asleep. This was a relief, for he dreaded going through the scene that he knew was in store for him, and which he felt in his heart he deserved. Until dawn he tossed restlessly, haunted by the memory of Mrs. Burton, living over again every thrilling moment he had passed with her, anticipating the morrow, when he was to see her again. She had promised to dance the cotillon with him at the Whitings' the following Saturday. This was a distinction he had scarcely hoped for; he knew there would be many to envy him, for Mrs. Burton's beauty and the high social position her husband had held gave her place among the most fêted of young matrons, for whose favor every man sought. It was not a small triumph for Herbert, coming as a stranger into these realms of wealth, with nothing to back him but his good looks and a wealthy friend.

The thought of Featherstone brought an appalling dread of their next meeting. He felt it to be more than likely that all would be over between them when he was asked to explain his absence from the dinner. What could he say?

In the note he had sent to excuse himself he had merely stated that he had been unavoidably detained and would explain later. With the rashness of a weak nature he had sought only to avoid the necessity of leaving Mrs. Burton, trusting to his quick wit to carry him through.

Now in the hour of nervous reaction, as he recalled the unpardonable offence he had offered his friend and the girl he had already somewhat compromised by too marked attention, he wondered what was to be the outcome of it. If Featherstone should carry out his oft-repeated threat and be done with him, where could he go? where obtain sufficient to live upon, even aside from the extravagances that had become necessities to him? There were flowers to be sent to Mrs. Burton for the Whitings'; how was he to get them?

With a groan he arose, threw on a dressing-robe, and paced about the room. "It's enough to drive any fellow to the dogs!" he growled, with the bitter self-compassion that was the one really softening emotion of which he was capable. "It's damnable to be situated like this. If he slates me, I'm lost, that's all." He stood by the window looking

upon the gray avenue, with its lines of closed windows, its barricaded shops, hushed in the unpeopled silence of early dawn.

A lank and treacherous-looking cat, its shoulder-blades protruding at each stealthy step, slinked across the street, confident in its supreme solitude.

Herbert's eyes followed it pensively. "I'll have to keep my temper with him, that's all," he thought. "I'll play the penitent act; that may bring him around."

It was a desperate condition, and he meant to catch at any straw offered, short of marrying Ethel Vanderstein. He knew that as her husband he would lose his position with Mrs. Burton. He felt pretty confident the latter would never regard him as anything nearer than a restricted lover, but this meant so much he could not be reconciled to resign it.

His vanity persuaded him that he could conciliate Featherstone, whose affection he might rely on. He was already greatly in his debt, a fact he used to excuse himself for the humility he intended to resort to.

As it turned out, however, Bobby was not as lenient as he expected; Herbert's defiance of his wishes in a matter of such importance was the last straw. They did not meet until that evening, on returning to the apartment to dress for a dinner. Herbert heard his host enter, and turned fearlessly to greet him.

"I'm sorry about last night, old fellow," he began, "but you see——"

"Oh, don't attempt any excuses," interrupted Featherstone in a sullen voice that might have warned Herbert of the uselessness of defending himself, "I know well enough where you were."

"I had a telegram from——"

"You were with Mrs. Burton!" cried Featherstone passionately. "Don't lie to me!"

"What rot!"

Featherstone faced him. They were in the little reading-room where they had spent so many hours in genial chat.

"Do you mean to say you were not with her?" he demanded.

Herbert did not hesitate, although the color left his face. "Of course I was not," he replied. "If you will give me half a chance, I'll explain——"

"Bah!" cried the other with a contemptuous gesture, "I want no excuses! I know her paper! You're a liar, and I want nothing more to do with you." He flung himself out of the room, banging the door.

Herbert stood dazed where he had left him. The blood rushed to his face, departing to leave it even paler.

The insult that had been hurled at him was quickly submerged

in his anxiety for his future, his terror of being thrown out now, just at the dawning of his social popularity. He thought of the injustice ruling his life; of the great things he might accomplish had he had one-half of Featherstone's wealth. He attributed his friend's unrelenting chagrin to jealousy, and spent the time while dressing alternately commiserating himself and imprecating Bobby.

The latter left the apartment without a word. As Herbert heard the door shut back of him, he set his teeth passionately. He had secretly hoped Featherstone would give him some opportunity before he left to offer an explanation and make up, so they might go to the dinner together. It would look funny, he thought, for them to appear there separately, especially as he, Herbert, was not so well known at the house.

"He thinks he can treat me like a child!" he said between his teeth as he tied his little white tie, "he can put his foot on me, because he has wealth!"

Some of his thoughts at the moment could not very well be put into words. He was savagely angry, and yet at the same time his mind was employed concocting a means whereby he might hope to bring Featherstone around in time to borrow enough to enable him to send Mrs. Burton some flowers. For the moment this was the most important matter in his life. It was impossible for him to dance the cotillon with her without sending handsome flowers; that attention was absolutely obligatory. As it was, he had scarcely five dollars in his possession, and his father had written he could spare him no more. Even Sam, to whom he had appealed several times, and never in vain, had sent him but fifty dollars instead of the hundred he had asked for, and accompanied the check with a note making it very clear that he would not again be able to help him.

However, the real seriousness of his position did not trouble Herbert so much as the immediate embarrassment. He was always sanguine of the future, with that egotistic faith in their own importance that makes insignificant natures rely on some omnipotent providence.

Before leaving the apartment he stopped in Featherstone's room to obtain a full view of himself in the long mirror there.

The room was fitted up like that of a prince; no conceivable luxury was lacking. The ceiling, like that in the front room, was a delicately tinted conception from the brush of Toujetti; the bed, a massive work of art in real bronze; the rugs, priceless Persians; every smallest feature had been chosen with the greatest care and after much discussion with connoisseurs.

When Herbert had viewed himself to his satisfaction he looked about him. A bitter smile curled his lip. He recalled hours of revelry that he and Bobby had spent in this sumptuous apartment; women of

high social standing who had not hesitated to come there to little suppers; others who had shamelessly sought his host there uninvited. He called up Bobby's round, snub-nosed face; his small, blood-shot eyes and graceless frame, and once more regarded his own tall and lithe form in the mirror. Why had everything been showered upon his unattractive friend, while he could not call a dollar his own?

In crossing to the door his eye fell upon some jewelry and a roll of bills lying in a carved ivory jewel-box that Featherstone usually forgot to close. Herbert paused. The roll was composed of ten-dollar notes; it was quite large, and must have contained something like a thousand dollars. Besides it, among the other things, was a valuable diamond ring that advice of others had made Bobby discard; should it disappear, he would scarcely have missed it.

There was no one near; the very silence and the vacancy of the rooms seemed to assume the character of a tempter's voice. Herbert thought of the flowers for Mrs. Burton; his heart began to throb fiercely.

He put out his hand and touched the bills, then drew it away. His breath quickened. He stood there staring upon the things, feeling unable to move or think clearly.

A bell rang someplace; he started violently, as though detected in a crime, and turned from the bureau.

"God! what am I coming to?" he groaned, as he strode out to the hall. "He leaves it open because he trusts his man—and I——"

Featherstone's valet approached him, coming from the front door. "A letter for you, sir."

Herbert's knees were shaking under him; he could not open the letter then, and did not even glance at the superscription until he had reached the street. He was surprised to see that it was from Ethel Vanderstein.

The very sight of her handwriting calmed him; all the cynicism and bitterness returned. Here was a woman for whom he cared nothing, who fairly threw herself at him. For the asking, he could indulge himself at her expense to the height of his bent.

How was it more heinous to rob Featherstone of a little of his superfluous millions, than to steal this girl's fortune under the cloak of marriage? It was rot and nonsense! At least, he would not be hurting Featherstone, and he certainly had already hurt Ethel Vanderstein.

Then the thought came,—why not marry her, and have some pleasure and comfort in life while he was young? There were not many young women of means who would be satisfied with a man who was merely attractive.

But the Widow's face rose up before him. He felt the nerve-

weakening charm of her influence steal over him. He remembered the thrilling glance of her half-closed eyes; the smiling, witty lips; the keen utterances that expressed her correct understanding of him and the world, and he returned to his philosophy, exalting what was propitious to his particular needs, and condemning what was not.

Under this spell of memory he thought of the next evening, of the flowers that she would expect, and a passionate rebellion made his blood hot as he realized that he could not possibly get her anything worthy with the small amount of money he had.

Suddenly an idea came to him, and the fact that he was only one block distant from the florist where Featherstone dealt, and where he had been accustomed to go in company with Bobby, made him act upon it at once. The bill would not be sent in for nearly a month, so the subterfuge would probably not be discovered before they had either made up or were parted for good, and after all, he thought, what he proposed doing was not such a crime.

He ordered Mrs. Burton to be sent on the morrow a superb cluster of lilies-of-the-valley and orchids, with no name enclosed, and had them charged to Featherstone's standing account.

IV.

IN consequence of this delay he was rather late in reaching Mrs. Wentworth's, although, fortunately for him, he was not the last. As it was, he was well enough pleased, for his tardy entrance attracted the attention of everyone present.

"Our mysterious Adonis," whispered young Mrs. Aperton, as he passed on his way to pay homage to the débutante of the affair, who sat at the room's farthest end.

He paused at once, having a particular penchant for young married women whose experience with the male sex led them to be delightfully personal in their conversation.

"Why mysterious?" he asked, bowing gallantly over her hand.

"You acknowledge yourself an Adonis then!" she exclaimed, laughing.

"I am everything you think me," he replied, "for your opinion is my being."

The smile faded gently on her delicately colored lips. She looked at him keenly, interrogatively.

"I like you," she said; "there is something spontaneous about you; and then—you are good to look at, and that is much in these days of blasé and dissipated youth."

He drew an odd-shaped, superbly upholstered bit of furniture nearer to her and seated himself.

"I am so glad you stopped me?" he murmured. "I was on my way to the bud."

"What! the worm was not tempted?" exclaimed Mrs. Aperton, and laughed mirthlessly. "She appears to be nice and pinky," she added, looking deliberately towards the young girl, who was giggling and gesticulating with two dull-looking youths.

"I can't stand very young women," said Herbert. "Their one object in life seems to be to make other people think they are having a good time."

Mrs. Aperton smiled. "Yes, and their one method of announcing it is by giggling."

"I wonder why it is that married women always have so much more charm than girls?" he asked, fixing his eyes intently upon her.

She glanced away wistfully, and replied with a significant note of sadness, "Perhaps it is because most of us have learned we made a mistake, and the hungering for something better wakes a chord of sympathy."

He leaned forward a little farther. "What man could ever feel himself worthy of a woman like you?" he whispered. "Only the madness of love could ever have endowed Aperton with the courage to ask you."

"The madness of love!" she repeated sadly, her eyes still turned from him in pathetic dreaminess. "What sins is it not accountable for!—and what sorrows!"

"Yes, and what joys!"

"If both are loving, perhaps; but marriage is seldom instigated by love on both sides."

"It should be."

"I know it should, but why is it that all lovable men are poor?"

Herbert closed his hand passionately and struck his knee. "I don't know!" he ejaculated with feeling. "It's wretched hard luck that any man should be poor—it's a crime! We can't do anything—we're misunderstood."

She looked at him thoughtfully. "Oh, no," she returned with quiet assurance. "It is not so bad for you, as it is for us women. I am well off now, and—unhappy; but I prefer all my unhappiness to going back to poverty."

"I know, there is no use scoffing at wealth," he said, "it's the thing that makes the world go round."

"When one has enough of it, yes,—when one is rich enough to buy off time-honored conventionalities."

His eyes told her that he understood.

"Oh, conventionality doesn't stand for much now, except in provincial towns," he returned. "All one needs is pluck enough to take

what falls to him, and enjoy it without attempting to share it with the world. The world never makes any attempt to share our sorrow, why should it pry into our joys?"

She smiled upon him benignly. "You are quite a philosopher, aren't you?"

Something in her tone embarrassed him slightly.

"Oh, I'm a little of everything!" he replied. "But at least I can reason this far, that as we have by our own wit and effort enhanced in value the few pleasures Heaven has bequeathed to us, why in the name of piety shouldn't we enjoy them?"

"How do you mean enhanced them?"

"Why, we have made them in every way more pleasant. The very fact that we restrict ourselves in certain things doubles our appreciation of them."

"That's true. The poet's words might be transcribed into—life is really not so beautiful, but that our seeing makes it so. But the difficulty is, we are afraid to recognize our own creation."

"Society is like an artist who has painted a beautiful nude Venus, and then immediately draws a veil over it, for fear the beauty might do harm. We can never see things quite so clearly and freshly as we do to-day, and we never can appreciate a thing in the same way twice. Why should we not take everything the minute it comes to tempt us? Every day we grow older, and the chance to enjoy things will never come again."

Mrs. Aperton laughed again, this time with real amusement. "Your philosophy contains dangerous teachings," she said pointedly. "But it appeals, although it would create a wild enough world if universally accepted."

"We are not talking of the common herd, but of ourselves," he returned. "There would be a wild world, if peasants drank champagne, stayed late in bed, and read volumes of modern philosophy!"

Heavy curtains on the left of the drawing-room were noiselessly drawn back at this moment, and the music, that until then had reached them faintly, now entered in clear strains from a wide be-palmed hallway that led to the dining-room.

In an alcove were installed a group of musicians in Hungarian costume. In their midst were two little girls, who arose as the curtains were drawn and entered the drawing-room, each with a basket on her arm filled with handsome boutonnières of white violets. To these were attached small white cards bearing each a lady's name.

When Herbert was given his, he read the name quickly. "Jove! I've been given the bud!" he whispered.

"I'll wager I have been given that old fogie of a Major," returned

his companion with a contemptuous smirk. "In pity address to me a remark now and then, to keep me awake between courses, won't you?"

Herbert glanced towards the adjoining drawing-room. "Aperton isn't here, is he?" he asked.

"No, he is in Washington."

"May I see you home?"

"You may—Mrs. Wentworth has risen, fly for your bud! Here comes my hungry mate, nosing about wearily—thank Heaven, it isn't the Major!"

Herbert hurried over to the youthful Miss Whorts. "I believe I am to have the honor!" he said, offering her his arm.

"I saw you when you first came in!" she exclaimed, beaming upon him. "I tried to hypnotize you to come over here, but I see your will is stronger than mine; or perhaps it was Mrs. Aperton?" She glanced up at him insinuatingly. "Was it?"

"Oh, I felt your power upon me," replied Herbert genially, "but I was afraid to obey it because of the crowd you had about you; I hate crowds."

"Oh, but *why* didn't you come? There were only two with me; and, to tell you the truth, I know you would have brightened us up lots."

Herbert made some equally vapid reply, and wondered if Mrs. Burton would like the choice he had made in her flowers.

All during dinner he secretly watched Featherstone, who did not look in his protégé's direction, and as Herbert noted this he felt there was little chance of a reconciliation.

As he carried out his agreement to see Mrs. Aperton home, he avoided meeting Bobby at their departure, and was glad to give him a little more time to cool down.

On arriving at her house Mrs. Aperton asked him if he would care to come in to see some trophies she had received that day from a former admirer, who was in command of a regiment in the Philippines.

"Come in and amuse me for a little while," she added. "I am dreadfully blue, and I couldn't think of sleeping for at least three hours." She stood looking down at him from an upper step with one hand alluringly outstretched, and although his common-sense told him it would be wiser to leave her, a combination of conditions made him enter.

V.

NEITHER he nor Featherstone arose the next day until after twelve. Their breakfasts were brought to them separately at that hour by Bobby's man, who, in obedience to the summons of his master, entered each room noiselessly, opened the windows for a moment to freshen the atmosphere, then carried to the young Sybarites' bedsides a large

silver basin of cold water, enlivened by a dash of viniagre de toilette with which to bathe their faces and hands. The breakfasts, served invitingly from the club next door, were as hot and tempting as could have been any light repast from the kitchen of Lucullus.

When he had finished, Herbert lay back in his comfortable bed, looking about him pensively. It would be hard, he thought, to give up all this luxury; it had become necessary to him; he wondered how he was ever to get along on nothing.

The thought of going to work and slaving for what had so far come so easily was not to be considered. The only thing to do was to make up with Bobby. Ever since their first meeting he had exerted a strong influence over Featherstone, and he did not believe that he could have entirely lost it. Impatiently acting upon this assurance, he made a false step by writing his host a few lines of fawning appeal and expressing his regret for what had occurred between them.

When the valet came for the tray, Herbert handed him the note to carry to his master.

There came no reply, and half an hour later he heard Featherstone leave his room and the front door of the apartment close back of him.

Herbert immediately recognized that he had made a mistake, and although he felt none of the keen humiliation that would have been the effect upon a more highly spirited man, his face darkened with anger. His pampered vanity rebelled against such treatment, in which he could only see the influence of mean jealousy on Featherstone's part. Now the question was, what was he to do? He intended to avoid Bobby until the next day, as he did not wish to come to blows with him until after the cotillon, but a final understanding was bound to come; he must be prepared!

He remembered Ethel Vanderstein's note, which he had not yet opened, and touched the electric bell at his bedside. The valet found the note in his overcoat pocket, and with it handed him a letter from his mother that had just arrived.

Miss Vanderstein's note made him laugh contemptuously. It was a foolish little appeal of girlish devotion.

"You are such a naughty boy," it went on, after the usual vapidty. "One can never depend upon you. But I did miss you very much last night; it took all the pleasure from the evening. Why are you like that? Really, I ought not to write to you, but I do want to see you. Will you come and dine with us to-morrow informally, before going to the Whiteleys' dance? Mother has given me permission to ask you, and we will be so glad if you do."

When he had finished reading it he lay back thinking. It seemed to be the only opening left him,—and yet! The old father was a close-fisted dog! While he lived no man would have much control of his

daughter's wealth. Besides, it would necessarily mean a severing of his relations with Mrs. Burton.

He tossed about and groaned. If only he could escape that fascination, he might marry this girl of money, and lure her away from her family's influence!

The situation as it then appeared was not promising, there was no alternative in sight. He might probably borrow a considerable sum from Mrs. Aperton, but only in return for abject devotion on his part, and this would anger the Widow!

He wearily took up his mother's letter. Perhaps she had succeeded in extorting something from the old man.

It contained, however, nothing more than twenty dollars from her own purse and a return railroad ticket to Bridgeport, with the information that Mr. Monroe was firm in his determination not to send him further assistance, although he was willing that he should return to the home of his parents and have the benefit of it with them all.

This proposition appeared too ridiculous to be even considered. He ground his teeth and uttered a profanity. "Go back! What do they think me? They ought to be proud to have one in the family a gentleman, instead of doing everything to down me!"

But as he perused the letter his ideas changed. It contained a bit of news that set him thinking in a new direction. Helen Mortimer's aunt had died, and Helen, who was now of age, had come into absolute possession of fifteen thousand dollars and the farm. If things came to the worst, he could go back, win Helen, and bring her to New York. A secret marriage—no one need know! He would have his liberty and the control of fifteen thousand!

The outlook had begun to brighten. He dispatched a note to Ethel Vanderstein regretting his inability to dine with her, and one to Mrs. Aperton containing a tender greeting and reminding her that he would be with her at dinner. This he sent by Featherstone's man with a dozen roses that he bade him buy on the strength of his mother's remittance. He did not wish to dine at Featherstone's club for fear of meeting him there; and although there had been no positive understanding that he should go to Mrs. Aperton, she had bade him come, and he was glad of the opportunity, being at a loss for other means of passing his time.

The afternoon stretched before him empty. It was a mild, beautiful day in January. His nature longed for some indulgence,—a drive with Mrs. Burton!

Featherstone kept three horses and had several traps. If he could be sure he had gone to ride, Herbert thought he would order one of the traps up and take Mrs. Burton out.

He dressed quickly, his heart made light by new hope founded on a clever but diabolical scheme that had been suggested to him like an inspiration of evil by the news in his mother's letter.

Upon investigating, he found that Bobby's riding-clothes and crop were gone, a fact signifying that his host would probably not be back before five at the earliest, and while the valet was still absent he went to the telephone and called up Mrs. Burton to ask if she would care to drive. Upon receiving her acquiescence he connected with the stable and ordered Featherstone's high cart to be brought around at once.

"It must be here in fifteen minutes," he said. "Can you manage it?"

"Yes," came back the answer. "I'll have it there, sir."

Herbert was on the eve of that reckless disregard of all proprieties that comes at critical periods to those who have never known the refining influence of self-denial. In this hour, when he felt it might all be slipping from him, he was impatient, as never before, to indulge every propensity, however extravagant and unreasonable. He paced the room restlessly, counting the moments, and hoping to get out before the valet should return to criticise him.

At last, after what seemed like an hour, the cart was announced from the office below, and Herbert lost no time; he caught up his coat with a thrill of joyous anticipation of the pleasure before him.

As he was about to leave the apartment, Featherstone let himself in with a pass key.

VI.

HERBERT, recognizing his host, shrank back; his color fled.

"Who had the impudence to order my trap around here?" demanded Bobby, his back to the closed door, and eying him with the fixed stare of an infuriated bulldog.

Herbert was speechless; for a moment his quick wit deserted him.

"Why the devil don't you answer," continued Featherstone, his rage fanned by the other's cowardice. "Did you do it? Did you have the damnable insolence to order my horses out?"

"I—I—" stumbled Herbert, then added with surprising coolness, surprising even to himself: "Look here, Bob, what's the use of going off the handle like this? I——"

"What's the use!" blazed the outraged Bobby. "I—— If you weren't such a mean, contemptible cur, I'd knock you down! But I wouldn't pay you the compliment, I wouldn't—— You're the most audacious, insolent dog any man was ever duped into befriending!"

"It's good taste of you to throw your hospitality in my face," sneered Herbert, knowing how the thrust would hurt one who posed as a stickler on proprieties of etiquette, "especially to a fellow who is still your guest."

"You've outraged all claim to decent treatment from me," he replied. "And let me tell you now, I don't consider myself your host

any longer! You've lied to me, not once, but a hundred times. You've—you've——"

Herbert, seeing him confused, smiled sneeringly. "Well, what more have I done that could excuse this exhibition of ill-breeding?"

Featherstone lurched forward to strike him with his riding-whip. "Don't you attempt any insolent speech to me!" he cried. "I'll teach you a lesson you'll never forget!"

Herbert pushed past him. "If anyone has anything to be ashamed of, it's you," he returned, smiling bitterly, "with your vile orgies here, your compromising of the wife of your——"

"God! you dare!" Featherstone, livid with rage, sprang at him like a wild-cat. Herbert beat his eager hands down with a cane grabbed from the hat-rack, and stepped back in time to escape him.

At the same moment the outside bell rang, and Bobby, expecting Mrs. Jack, with whom he had been riding, to come in for afternoon tea, sank back against the wall, trembling and white. He did not speak or move. Both, breathing heavily, stood glaring at each other, Herbert with coldly curling lip, Featherstone's blanched face quivering with passion he was straining to master.

The bell rang again, and it seemed to be the last straw to Bobby's nerves. He turned in the opposite direction and bellowed his valet's name; then through his teeth hissed at Herbert, "Get out! and never let me see your face again!"

"I shall send for my things this afternoon," returned Herbert with the same insolent coolness. "Will you kindly have your man put them up?" He then opened the door and disclosed Mrs. Jack's footman.

"Mr. Featherstone?" murmured the servant deferentially.

"Just inside," said Herbert; "he will speak to you himself."

On reaching the street he saw Mrs. Jack's carriage standing opposite an approximate shop, where she had entered to cover her real destination. But Herbert gave her little thought; it was necessary to secure some sort of a trap at a livery stable to keep his appointment with Mrs. Burton.

He was grateful for the "drib" from his mother that he had formerly scorned, for with it he secured a turnout, and was soon flying through Central Park behind a fleet and fine-looking animal with the woman who possessed more power over him than any other influence in life. He did not tell her of his trouble; he put it absolutely out of his mind, and did not even permit the uncertainties of where he would spend the night to throw the slightest shadow on his hour of joy.

On returning, he ordered his things to be taken to the Holland House, pawned the watch his parents had given him for fifty dollars, then dressed and hurried to Mrs. Aperton's. He arrived there just in

time to sit tête-à-tête with her before a cosey little dinner. But they had two hours after dining in which to chat, for Herbert had arranged to call for Mrs. Burton at half-after eleven.

The excitement of his situation, the close margin to which he was reduced, possessed the charm of novelty. He admired himself for managing the difficult matter as he had, and entrusted the future to this newly discovered ability.

VII.

THE evening brought a new surprise that added to his uneasy plight. It was in the sixth figure of the cotillon, when he presented his partner with one of the oddest favors of the evening,—a beautiful green Florida lizard, enclosed in a tiny gold cage.

"What am I supposed to do with this beast?" she asked, examining it anxiously.

"Feed it on baby bottle-flies, of course!" he said, laughing.

"But where do bottle-flies keep their babies? And must they be cooked or raw? Served on a fork or in a dish?"

"You make them into a light omelet, pour carefully into an ordinary cold-cream box, and serve cold."

They laughed foolishly, and swept into the dance.

"Let us escape into the next room," she whispered after a few moments. "They will never miss us in this crowd, and I have something important to tell you." They ceased dancing, and entered the wide marble hallway, that glowed like a veritable garden with flowers and verdure, through which gleamed myriad electric lights. On every side comfortable, cosey corners and shadowy retreats lured those who wished to escape the glare and noise.

In one of these—the farthest from the more crowded sections—they installed themselves, Mrs. Burton in a nest of downy pillows, Herbert lounging near her.

"I hope what you have to tell me is something pleasant," he said, looking with adoration into the narrow eyes that regarded him so knowingly. "I am down on my luck just at present, and I do need some comfort, dear."

"It depends upon how you look at it," she replied. "I am going to London."

Herbert did not stir; he stared as though she had struck him in the face, and paled as he had that afternoon under Featherstone's fury. But instead of the former sneer his lips were now compressed with the sudden pain that closed about his heart.

"Are you in earnest?" he asked heavily.

"Perfectly. There is some property of my husband's now in litigation, and it is necessary for me to be there this month. Besides, I really prefer leaving New York just at present, so I am just as well pleased."

Herbert clinched his hands and stared at the floor. The probability of losing her was something he had not the courage to face. His infatuation was wholly absorbing,—first, because it represented something yet unattained, and, secondly, because it alone in all his life had surmounted his self-love.

"You might have told me before," he said peevishly, "and not burst it upon me like this."

"I don't see how I could possibly have let you know earlier, when I myself only knew it this morning," she returned. "As it is, you are the only being to whom I have yet confided it."

"When do you go?"

"The fifteenth. I would go earlier, but for my dinner on the twelfth."

He was silent a moment, then looked at her appealingly. "You speak of going light-heartedly," he said with quivering lips, "while to me it is like hearing my death-sentence."

"But why? You are a man of leisure and means,—come with me; I shall be quite alone."

A flash of color swept across his face and his eye brightened. He heard nothing but those words, "Come with me."

He caught her long, warm hand, from which she had drawn her glove on the pretence of arranging her bodice, and pressed it excitedly. "Shall I?" he whispered. "Do you mean that? Do you want me?"

"If you can come, yes," she returned quietly. "There is no one else."

His face darkened again; her tone recalled him to reality. How could he go without a cent to call his own?

The contact with her hand set his blood on fire; he pressed his cheek upon it in silent anguish. Mrs. Burton turned her hand gently, and allowed her fingers to caress his lips. She felt him respond with a nervous shiver. He crushed her hand, kissing it frantically.

"Let me go with you," he groaned. "I must go! I cannot live without you; not a day,—not an hour! I shall go with you, at any cost!—I shall follow you through hell!"

"Hush!" she laid her fingers upon his impetuous lips. "Someone will hear you."

"What do I care? There is nothing in the world for me without you; I could no more live without you than——"

"Well, there, calm yourself," she said, holding him back. "I don't want to be made an exhibition of here. If you can come, I shall be glad to have you. I really think I would miss my little boy before long." The look and smile with which she accompanied these words seemed to deprive him of all strength. He drew a quick breath and

bowed his head again upon her hand, losing himself in a delicious inertia of emotion.

"I shall," he murmured; "against all odds I shall go with you."

VIII.

Two days later Herbert was on his way to Bridgeport. His mind was made up; at any cost he meant to accompany Mrs. Burton to Europe. He had not yet determined how, but if not by fair means, then by foul. The very night of the cotillon he had sat up writing Helen Mortimer of his intended return, in a letter whose undercurrent suggested a desire to see her. To the mother, whose one absorbing thought he was, he did not write, but sent touching messages to her through Helen. He also accomplished a dramatic effect by stating in practical despair that, finding everything against his making headway in the world, he had determined to enlist as a common soldier to fight in the Philippines. This stroke he felt would have the desired effect, and it did. Helen had never ceased to think of him for one hour through all those months of his absence. Her imagination, craving a fuller, broader life, had endowed him with all the attributes of an ideal modern prince. Dreaming of his more interesting existence, she had come to rebel against her own. The simplicity with which habitude had clothed her naturally high-strung and sensitive nature could not wholly subdue a secret restlessness of spirit, and when she received her small inheritance, and realized that she was mistress of herself, there came moments of wild longing to be away.

The undertone of tenderness in Herbert's letter made her hope that she might be able to dissuade him from the rash step; it encouraged her even to dream of a possible future wherein he and she might start a new life together in the great city of New York, with her fifteen thousand dollars to help build up a fortune. This thought always started her heart beating wilder, and she would try to quiet herself by saying, "Oh, no, that would be too much; no one is as happy as that in the world."

The same afternoon of its receipt she had promised to drive with Sam in his new red-wheeled buggy, but in her impatience to break the news to the Monroes she hurried to her neighbors' on foot, telling her cousin, who, with his wife, had come to live on the farm and manage it for her, that she would probably not be back for supper.

Mr. and Mrs. Monroe were sitting in the sunny side parlor, whose windows looked out on the curving avenue with its border of fine old trees stretching their wide branches leafless and black against the clear winter sky.

Mrs. Monroe had worsted work in her lap, but her hands lay idly upon it, her kind gray eyes resting upon Sam, who stood outside watch-

ing the stableman prepare his buggy and horse, while her thoughts were far away with "Herb."

"Where is Sam going?" asked her husband, following her glance over the top of his paper, "up to Mortimers' again?"

"I guess so," replied his wife.

"It looks as though he'd cut Herb out with Helen," with a sheepish twinkle.

"Well, it isn't much to his credit if he does!" snapped his spouse. "I wrote Herbert the other day that I thought him a fool to let her forget him, especially now that she's come into that money. It would start them well together, and she certainly had her heart set upon him first."

Mr. Monroe laid down his paper and hugged his knee. "Well, I'd like to know why Sam hasn't just as much right there as anyone," he said slowly. "Herb went off; he's got such high and mighty ideas; and I don't see that he's so much more taking in his appearance and ways than Sam. Sam has the better stuff in him. Look at him studying there at the night-school every evening to make a lawyer of himself! He's laid up a sum from his own work too, and he's more fit to marry the girl."

"It's a pity Herb couldn't have taken an interest in things here," said Mrs. Monroe with a sigh. "You never gave him much encouragement, it seems to me."

"I did all I could to get him interested," returned Joseph, "and you know it. I did more than I ought to have done. Here I am strapped merely because of the expenses he's put me to. He hasn't it in him, that's the fact of the matter. For my part, I don't believe in all this college— Why, here comes Helen herself! Sam's going to take her from here, I reckon."

His wife leaned forward to get a better view of the avenue, up which Helen was advancing briskly. If she isn't a picture!" she murmured admiringly, to which Monroe grunted assent, then hurried to open the front door.

"I have such news!" cried Helen, her face and eyes beaming. "Herb's coming home!"

"What!" Mrs. Monroe started up to greet her, dropping her balls of worsted on the floor. Mr. Monroe sat down on the edge of the horse-hair sofa and locked his hands together.

"Yes," continued Helen breathlessly, "and—and he says he's going to the Philippines."

"No!"

"Yes, that's what he's coming back for, to—to—say—good-by!" Helen, overcome by excitement rather than the confidence in what she uttered, broke into convulsive sobs as she unfolded Herbert's letter.

"Well, I declare!" murmured Mrs. Monroe, "and he never wrote to me!"

"He sends you many messages," sobbed Helen. "He seems rather hurt because he thinks you all don't care much about him."

Mr. Monroe leaned forward, his elbows on knees, and his chin in his hand, listening as Helen read out bits of the letter.

"Oh, my poor boy!" murmured the elder woman in distress. "I don't understand. I've written him four letters in the past week. Perhaps he didn't get them."

"Perhaps you didn't send what he asked for!" remarked her husband, somewhat bitterly.

Mrs. Monroe turned with indignant, tear-shining face. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" she demanded. "It's you and Sam that have driven him to risk his life in war!" the last word was drowned in a sob.

"He hasn't gone yet," remarked Monroe. "You'd better keep your tears till the day he goes."

Just then his wife caught sight of Sam passing by in his shining buggy. She threw open the window.

"Come in quick, Sam!" she cried excitedly, "we've got some news!"

As Sam entered he gave a start on beholding Helen, then looked inquiringly from her tearful face to his mother.

"What's the matter?" he asked. Mr. Monroe watched him curiously out of the side of his eyes.

"Herb's coming back!" said his mother, sobbing hysterically. "He'll be here to-morrow. He wrote Helen all about it."

With the look that came into Sam's face, his father bowed his head. Helen glanced at him too, but he was staring ahead, his hands hanging helplessly. For scarcely a moment he stood so, then heaved his broad shoulders restlessly. "Well, what are you all crying about?" he asked. "Do you consider his coming back a—calamity? I guess I'll put the horse up again."

Helen, instinctively feeling the significance of his words, stepped towards him.

"No, Sam," she said, "I'll go with you."

Sam paused, and fingered his cuff-button attentively.

"I guess if he wrote to you—and—you were glad—or—sorry, or—anything, I guess you oughtn't to be driving about with me, Helen."

Helen bent the letter she held in a momentary embarrassment.

"Did you write back?" asked Sam, glancing at her inquiringly.

"Yes," said Helen.

He smiled in a strangely tremulous way, then went out and led his horse by the bridle back to the barn.

IX.

HERBERT was too clever to be guilty of any unseemly precipitancy in his advances towards Helen, although the girl's attitude made it clear enough that he could have her for the asking. But there were others to be considered, and whom he knew were watching him keenly,—his parents and Sam. He had two full weeks before him, and in that time he planned to win Helen's entire confidence, besides securing himself against all suspicion in the eyes of the others. It was a trying period for him; there were endless long talks with his father, who had pointed out to him the advisability of his settling down at home to assist Sam to carry on the estate, and how he would probably before long become sole proprietor, as his brother meant to practise law in Bridgeport as soon as he could do so legitimately. He also had brotherly talks with Sam that set his teeth on edge and endless coddling from his mother.

In addition to this, the deadly monotony of the place preyed upon his over-excited state of mind, and twice in the first week he felt obliged to visit the town of Bridgeport for the excitement and diversion that had become absolutely necessary to him. To do him justice, he suffered considerable self-reproach when he permitted himself to appreciate what he was planning to do, and it was for this reason he utilized every means available of stilling thought.

It was not long before trusting and admiring Sam began to see beneath the false veneer of his brother's education, and in his generous judgment to recognize how greatly Herbert had been wronged by his too fond parents. It was owing to this persuasion that Sam guiltily withheld from their knowledge the secret of his brother's several late returns from night-time revelry in the town. With the exaggerated sense of loyalty native to a disposition both tender and comparatively unsophisticated, he deemed it best to bear the burden of his knowledge alone, and although he attempted to remonstrate with Herbert, he felt that his words lacked strength to his brother's comprehension, who only smiled and insinuated that Sam was no judge of such things.

One evening, towards the end of the second week, Herbert did not come home to supper, but he so often passed the afternoon and remained to supper with Helen that it caused little comment.

"I suppose Herb's over at Mortimers'," remarked Mrs. Monroe when the meal was over, as she set aside for him some cold custard and broiled chicken.

Sam closed his hand fiercely under the table; and Mr. Monroe, who had long been secretly criticising his younger son, pushed his chair back, seized his paper, and, looking over the top of his glasses, responded, "Well, I guess he'll get enough to eat, if he is, and there's no use putting by that stuff. You fuss over him as you would over a baby."

"Oh, hold your tongue!" replied his wife. "You would let him go on as though he had no home; but I'm his mother, and I want him to know he isn't forgotten."

"You're ruining him, that's what you're doing!" growled Joseph, feeling for his pipe as he strolled into the front room.

His wife grunted disdainfully and continued to arrange a dainty little supper for her pet on the sideboard. She then asked Sam to get the checker-board and play a game with her.

He obeyed with quiet good-nature that gave no evidence of the disappointment her request caused him. He had looked forward to a quiet stroll in the twilight, where he could think out his secret anxiety about Herbert's real attitude towards Helen.

"Sam," said his mother softly in the midst of their game, with a keen glance over her spectacles, "your father's been hintin' that our boy isn't going quite right. What do you think?"

Sam did not reply; he seemed puzzled over his next move.

"You've got something on your mind, Sam, I know it," said his mother; "now, you've just got to tell me."

"It's not for me to tell you,"—he made his move,—“ask the boy himself."

"I have asked him, many's the time, and he only laughs and kisses me; but I feel something is wrong, and you don't want to hide it from me, because it will only make things more fretting in the end."

"I have nothing to tell you more than you can see for yourself."

"Do you think he's been drinking?"

"I know he has," replied Sam with a determined look.

His mother jerked back in her chair. "How do you know it?" she demanded petulantly.

"Because I've seen it."

"Well, I haven't and your father hasn't, and it's very strange you should be the only one."

"You asked me," he returned quietly.

"Yes, because I thought you'd be just to the boy."

Sam was silent.

"I might have known what you'd say. You've always been a bit jealous of the lad."

"It's your move, mother."

Mrs. Monroe jerked a checker from one square to another heedlessly. "Poor boy, he's pecked at and slandered by the lot of you! It's good he's got a mother who can understand him and friends who like him."

Her son looked at her. "Did you mean to do that?" he asked. "I'll jump you."

She drew the checker back and made another move.

"Who's that prowling down there in the orchard?" said Mr. Monroe from where he sat on the steps out of earshot.

Sam leaned over and peered through the window towards the orchard, which lay to the right, and beheld a man moving unsteadily among the trees. Although he could not discern him, he felt sure it was Herbert. He arose hurriedly, fearing his father might also make the discovery.

"I'll go and see," he said; "it may be someone after the chickens." He started off on a run.

On arriving he found Herbert in a sad state of intoxication, and little prone to accept any interference, being in the maudlin condition which brooks no control.

"You'd better let me get you to your room," said Sam coldly. "Father saw someone coming through here, and you don't want him to find you like this, or there'll be a row."

"Oh, let me alone, will you!" growled Herbert thickly. "What's the matter with me? I'm all right." His face was pale, and with long, drawn lines about the mouth. "I'm going up there to see mother."

"No, you're not, Herbert," Sam said with deep feeling; "you'll be sorry if you do, I tell you."

"Well, I don't want any of your d——d advice or interference, so go on about your business!" returned his brother.

"It'll only bring trouble if you go up."

"Well, all right; that's my affair. I'm as sober as you are." With that he bumped blindly into a tree that stood in front of him and knocked off his hat.

As he stooped to get it he almost fell, and Sam caught him by the arm. "See here," said the latter with a sudden force, "I'm not going to let you go up yonder and fret the old people, so you've just got to come with me."

Herbert jerked his arm away and turned fiercely upon him. "What the devil do you mean?" he demanded. "Do you think I'm going to let you bully me? Take that and learn not to interfere. He lurched forward and struck Sam, who was unprepared, in the face.

Sam paled, and his eyes shone fiercely.

"I'll not give you that back," he said with quiet strength, "because you're not in your right senses; but to-morrow I'll thrash you for it and—something else you did to injure me."

Herbert laughed insultingly. "You booby," he said, "I'd like to see you thrash me. Come on, let's have it now!" He stepped back and doubled his fists, ready for the attack. Sam made a quick movement and brought into play the muscles he had used for eight years on the farm. He caught Herbert's hands and pinioned them back of

him with irresistible strength. "Come," he said, "I'm tired of this nonsense."

Herbert was savage; he struggled feebly, but his efforts were absolutely impotent in the iron grasp of his brother.

Mr. Monroe, sitting on the porch, leaned over between his wide-spread legs and peered fixedly towards the orchard.

"I guess I'll go over," he said, rising and starting down the steps.

"Why? what's the trouble?" called his wife, who was still sitting back of the checker-board.

"Oh, nothing." He started slowly across the lawn, but quickened when a short distance from the house.

He reached his two struggling sons and came to a stand-still, with legs planted far apart and hands thrust in his pockets. "Well!" he ejaculated, slowly and pathetically, "if this isn't a pretty sight!"

Drinking, to Mr. Monroe, was the most deadly of the cardinal sins. He was an iron-clad prohibitionist, never having slaked his parched throat, even on the hottest day, with anything more "heady" than new, home-made cider. "If this isn't a sight!" he repeated in a sadder tone, nodding his head.

"I'll teach this booby!" muttered Herbert with impotent rage, that was farcical under the control of Sam.

"Let him go, Sammy," said his father without moving, and Sam relaxed his hold. Herbert flew at him, panting from exhaustion.

"You scoundrel!" he cried thickly, with hatred in his eyes, "I'll pay you for this yet."

"Ain't you ashamed of yourself?" said his father, without changing his position.

"I'll make that cur sweat for his insolent interference!" said Herbert, making an effort to regain his feet.

"You, whom I have done so much for!" continued his father in the same tone.

"Oh, to the devil with what you've done! You are always harping on that. I wish to Heaven I hadn't let you spend a cent on me."

Mr. Monroe's face became livid. He pressed his lips so tightly that his beard stood out horizontally under his nose.

"Take him away from here," he said in a low, stern voice; "we don't want his mother to see him like this; it wouldn't do."

"He'll not touch me!" cried Herbert, making a desperate effort to rise; "if he lays a hand on me, I'll——"

His father drew his hands from his pockets with a deliberate air. "We'll see," he said. "Lend me a hand, Sam?"

Herbert looked at his face and became suddenly calm.

"Here, don't try any of that," he said, "or there may be trouble. Let me alone, and I'll walk."

"Well, walk!" said his father; whereupon Herbert, scrambling to his feet, slouched ahead of them, muttering vengeance on Sam.

His father and brother did not open their lips until they saw him into his room, nor did they discuss the subject afterwards, but separated immediately. Mr. Monroe walked slowly into the gloom of gathering dusk, his head hanging low, his hands in his pockets, while Sam returned to finish the game with his mother.

"Well, did you get the man out?" she asked, roused by his approach from anxious thoughts.

"Yes," replied Sam uncompromisingly.

"And he didn't get anything?"

"Nothing. It's your move," said her son.

X.

THE next day they saw nothing of Herbert, who even failed to appear at the mid-day dinner. Only Sam knew where he had gone to breakfast, for he had seen him, early in the morning, crossing rapidly over the fields that lay between their place and the Mortimers'. The sight had hurt him more cruelly than he dared to acknowledge to himself. As he watched his brother's slight, well-knit form moving on so confidently towards the girl he himself loved so deeply, a hideous emotion made him feel faint for an instant. It seemed to him such a degradation to have Herbert approach her, with his selfish, unscrupulous nature; it appeared to embody some menace to her. A heavy depression settled upon his mind that he was unable to throw off.

At dinner Mrs. Monroe talked continually of Herbert, until Sam felt on the verge of an outburst. The knowledge of his brother's unworthiness of the girl he was so surely winning ate into his heart; and yet there was nothing to do. Any effort of his to save her would only be misunderstood, he could but stand by silently and watch.

"Herb fairly lives at Mortimers' now," continued his mother when the ordeal of a dinner for which he had no appetite was at last over, "I don't see much of him." Mr. Monroe stirred his coffee; Sam stared at the cloth.

"I guess there will something develop out of this before long, don't you think so, Joe?"

"I've not thought about it."

"Well, I think you might show a little interest in your son!" complained Mrs. Monroe. "It would be a mighty fine thing if he were to marry Helen."

Sam pushed back his chair and rose. His father glanced at him, then at his untouched dessert, but said nothing until Sam left the room, then he also arose. "I guess you'd better keep the talk about Herb and Helen for any time except at table," he said irritably.

His wife looked up in astonishment. "What is the matter with you, anyway?" she demanded, as clearly as the replete condition of her mouth would permit. "You've been acting most queerly this whole day!"

"Well, if you're blind, I'm not!" returned her husband, pausing at the door to look back. "And I tell you you're not to talk any more about Herbert and Helen Mortimer before Sam, and I want you to remember it! With that he left the room, lips compressed, and shaggy brows drawn down angrily.

That night, when they were gathered as usual in the big front room, Joseph absorbed in his paper and pipe, Sam playing the customary game of checkers with which he sought to amuse his mother before retiring to study, they were startled by the excited entrance of John Allen, Helen's cousin.

He came with the astounding news that Helen had eloped with Herbert that afternoon, and he produced as proof to their bewildered eyes a letter written by the girl herself confirming what he said. The letter had been penned in the station at Bridgeport, in a style more Herbert's than Helen's, and stated that they had already been married civilly, but gave no address and no information as to where she was going.

Sam said nothing, although his face blanched, and while the others were absorbed in discussing the affair, he arose quietly and went out into the clear, cold night. He walked quickly for a few yards down the avenue, then stopped abruptly and looked about him. The scene appeared strangely unfamiliar. He felt a peculiar sense of emptiness stretching from the direction of the Mortimers' across the darkness to his heart. He looked up and saw a young moon and stars, and the tall, still pine-trees on the hill standing black against a translucent sky, and it all seemed hideous and unreal to him.

He drew a deep breath, and with head bowed strode on into the darkness.

XI.

HELEN had been married several months. For three successive and blissful weeks Herbert had been with her constantly, helping to furnish their tiny apartment in Hooper Street, Brooklyn. He had evinced great interest and care in fitting up the little rooms comfortably and tastefully for her; he had spent hours in shops helping her to choose, and making suggestions that were always for her comfort and independent of his. For those three weeks she knew the wonderful and rare blessing of perfect happiness.

Then Herbert departed, telling her it was necessary to absent himself for a little while in order to secure a very lucrative position of which he had already spoken to her, and that to obtain it he would be

obliged to keep his marriage secret for a short time. He implored her to trust him, and explained that it was a common thing for young men to leave their wives for a week or two to better their conditions; it was only by such self-sacrifice they could hope to succeed. He also warned her against having her address known for a short time, even by her family, lest it should get abroad that she was his wife, and as the people with whom he was negotiating desired a single man, he feared his chances would be jeopardized should the truth get out. He made it clear that such deceptions were absolutely necessary if one wished to succeed, and she, in her innocence of the world and trusting love, accepted it with perfect confidence.

To her Herbert was faultless; there was no room in her heart for doubt; she grieved that he was obliged to leave their little home so soon, even for a short time, and remembering how bravely he had spoken of his going as a cruel but necessary self-sacrifice, she honored him for it.

Each day she looked for a letter, and when it did not come, consoled herself with the thought that he dared not write for fear of being detected. A week passed, and her heart knew no misgiving. The week stretched into a month, the month into others,—hot summer months, passed partly in illness. She awoke one day in September to find that there were only three hundred dollars remaining of the five hundred Herbert had left her. Where he had placed the remaining fourteen thousand she had not thought to ask. Even in the cruel hour of her awakening she could not sully her beautiful memory with the stain of a hideous crime. She clung to it, like a child to a headless doll, unwilling to believe that there was only sawdust where she had so trustingly pictured a loving heart.

But, like a slowly rising tide, the truth grew up between her and her childhood, teaching her that agony of loneliness which comes when one's dearest trust has been betrayed, and one's child-nature shocked to cynical maturity by a sudden revelation of sin and treachery.

The truth was revealed one day as she was clearing out her closet for the winter, laying fresh papers on the shelves and packing her summer things. As she smoothed out one newspaper from among those she had been saving for months, her eyes were attracted, as though by some magnetic force, to the name "Herbert S. Monroe," printed clearly among the passengers sailing that day, the fourteenth of March, on the Germanic. She stared at it, unable to move. The many months of her waiting returned to her mind mockingly; she remembered all she had suffered, and her spirit suddenly awoke to rebellious anger, such as she had never known before.

Beneath his name was that of one John Maxwell, and above it Mrs.

Tinsley Burton. All three seemed photographed upon her mind; for days she could not be rid of 'hem.

She had written in sheer desperation, now and again, to the people at home, never giving her address or hinting by the slightest word that her life was not happy. But now these letters were more difficult to write. The fact that she had been so cruelly duped made her of her sorrow, a more mature view of things. To return to the old life was impossible; she had tasted the intoxicating sweetness that lies secreted in life, and she had drunk deep of its bitterness. Her nature secreted in life, and she had drunk deep of its bitterness. Her nature had been spurred to full sensuousness; it craved action and excitement to fill the void.

Her eyes had been opened considerably during these three months, and, although still an innocent woman, she had begun to take a broader view of life. She soon realized it would be necessary to do something for her support against the time when the little money she had should be exhausted. Miss Elison, an elderly spinster she had taken to board with her on her neighbor's recommendation, advised Helen to go on the stage. The proposition was a shock to inherited prejudices; she rejected it with scorn.

"Well, I can't see what else you can do," remarked her friend, who made a precarious living with music lessons and playing the church organ on Sundays. "You can't be a teacher without a diploma from some school, and you are unable to teach music, painting, or anything."

"I can sew," Helen said wearily.

"Sew! Why, my dear child, you couldn't earn bread and butter by sewing."

"Well, I could learn typewriting." Helen paced the room nervously. "If only you would come to New York City with me, I'd find something to do!"

"Oh, everyone thinks that!" returned the other; "but New York proper is overrun with typewriters, and people seeking employment in every conceivable way, who can't keep body and soul together. Look at the daily papers,—columns upon columns of women who offer their services for almost nothing."

"There would be no use, then, to advertise?"

"Not the least bit. Besides, what would you advertise as?"

"I—could be a nursery governess."

"It would be a dog's life. But if you want that, look in the Sunday paper; you will be just as likely to find something that way as by advertising, and save your money. But it is a menial position; you would hate it. If I had your looks and—presence, I'd most certainly go to see some theatrical manager and offer my services. I have

a friend who has a position in 'The Lost Chord' just through her looks and nothing else. She gets thirty dollars a week, and has scarcely anything to do."

"Oh, no; I couldn't endure that," said Helen, who had been to the theatre but once, and then much to her aunt's distress, for she considered the stage a sure way to perdition. "To stand up and be stared at as a means of living,—it must be awful!"

"Well, I'd rather stand up and be stared at an hour or so, for thirty dollars a week, than I would to slave my life out all day long, merely to sleep at night under a roof and have three miserable meals. Actresses have some excitement, some pleasure in living, while we plod through the days for—I don't know what! nothing but the privilege of breathing and eating and sleeping: a cat has that!"

"Oh, I know. But actresses are so bad."

"How are they bad? Because they take a little enjoyment out of life? What do they do that is bad?"

"Oh, I don't know; but I have always heard so."

Miss Elison laughed. "Well, don't you believe it," she said; "they are not as bad as they're painted. We all take life too seriously, that is the truth. I wish I had seen things as clearly when I was younger, I wouldn't be where I am now. Where do these narrow principles lead you to, anyway?—to a disappointed old age, that's all. Look at the best society. Do you ever hear of worse scandals on the stage than you do in society? And in society most of the wickedness is kept quiet, while everything is open in an actress's life." Miss Elison compressed her colorless lips and slowly shook her head. "No, don't preach exaggerated proprieties to me; they have spoiled many a life, as they have mine. If I had ever married and had a daughter, I would teach her merely how to take care of herself, not how to avoid happiness by a false understanding of right and wrong."

"Happiness may be had without illegitimate excitement," said Helen pensively. "It wouldn't make me happy to spend my time in a whirl of gayety and dissipation."

"Would it make you happy to sit ten hours on a piano stool trying to drum simple rules into stupid children, eat a lonely dinner, and creep into bed too tired in body and soul even to read for an hour's recreation? Oh, no,—for me, give me the whirl of gayety and dissipation, as long as it does not pass the line of decency."

Helen stood by the window looking into the past,—into those long weeks of anguish that now blotted out all memory of the three first weeks with their incomparable but false joy.

She seemed to herself like a being wholly apart from the young and trusting girl who had come there as a happy bride; she was older, wiser, and more cold. Yet the philosophy of the elder woman did not

ring true to her understanding. Though grief had to some extent hardened her nature and shattered some ideals, it had not embittered her. She had not yet felt the galling grind of real poverty, nor had the sweet freshness and purity of her home influence been tainted by contact with sordid life or the fever of unscrupulous ambition. Her heart, although so incurably wounded, still trusted the future,—not with the old, tender anticipation, but with an eagerness for action, an impatience to lift herself out of the darkness and distrust that had settled upon her. Never before had she had so great a longing to accomplish something, to rise defiantly above the treachery that had so nearly crushed her. In place of the wild grief with which she had slowly realized the truth of her situation, she knew a spirited self-reliance, and on this she determined to rise.

"If you did have that sort of life you would probably not like it," she said quietly. "You believe it would make you happy because you are told it is happiness. Women weren't intended for that sort of thing; we need love and—to be cherished and taken care of."

"Oh, yes; that's all very well," returned the spinster; "but if that is not available, then give me excitement in preference to drudgery."

If that is not available! The words hurt her hearer; they awoke a secret rebellion against her own philosophy that had long been brewing in Helen's mind, and made her half-distrustful of herself. This was one of the reasons why she so craved employment; she was afraid of herself.

The following Sunday she wrote in answer to several advertisements for nursery governesses, but her letters were ignored. She was advised by her friend to answer one in person. It was a widower with two little girls, who wished a young lady of refinement to look after them.

She found a very pompous Jew, whose most salient characteristics were wealth and avoirdupois.

Nevertheless, she permitted herself to be engaged, under the name Helen Morton, which she determined to adopt, and went to live in a great mansion on Lexington Avenue with two little, ugly, dark girls under her charge. She was given private apartments with them, and was treated with sufficient dignity by all but the children, who were spoiled and exacting. To her high-strung spirit the feeling of dependence was hard to bear, and there were no congenial associations and no prospect of anything better.

Yet she was grateful to have her time occupied, even by the fretting and ceaseless demands of the two unlovable girls, who seemed to thoroughly understand they could exact the services from her for which their father paid.

At first she saw little of her employer, but later it was arranged that she and the children should dine with him, except on occasions when he had company. This she did not relish, for personally the man was repulsive to her, and his growing attentiveness soon caused her keen discomfort.

One Saturday evening at dinner he asked her if she would like to go to the theatre, and upon her declining somewhat coolly he said persistently: "Why not? You don't have much fun. I'd like to see you enjoy yourself. You're not the sort of girl that ought to be mewed up all the time in a nursery."

"I am perfectly satisfied to be so," returned Helen with dignity.

When the children had been put to bed, their father sent for Helen, saying he wished to have a little talk with her. She descended to his study, wondering what the summons could mean, and although not consciously anticipating the truth, she instinctively shrank from the interview.

Mr. Goldstein was standing before the fire, a large cigar in his mouth, his hands back of him. As Helen entered he stepped forward and closed the door behind her.

"Sit down, my dear, sit down," he said cordially, without removing the cigar, then drew a chair close to her. "You weren't offended at me for asking you to go to the theatre, were you?"

"No, I was not offended."

He eyed her admiringly, then squirmed about and chewed his cigar. "You see, I hate to know you don't get out more. You're young, you ought to have more fun. I could give you a mighty good time, and I'm willing to do it,—I'd like to do it."

Helen sat up. "Thanks," she said, "but I am not here to have a good time; I am here to earn my living, and I desire nothing more."

Her employer waved his bejewelled hand contemptuously. "Oh, that's all very well!" he said. "But your living's all right; don't you worry. I recognize you're doin' your duty, and I want to see you enjoy yourself. If you'd only not—eh—give me the cold shoulder, I'd show you a little life. You're too good-looking to be shut up——"

Helen arose. "Is this all you wished to say?" she asked coldly, fixing her angry gray eyes upon him.

Mr. Goldstein stared at her with open mouth and without rising, then jumped to his feet in a flurry. "Now, look here; don't take on like that," he coaxed. "I'm only meaning to be friendly. I like you,—I like you very much." As he spoke he leaned forward and took her hand. Helen pulled it away angrily, her face flushing.

"You are most insulting!" she exclaimed, and started to the door. On arriving there, she turned and faced him where he stood in a posture of silly amazement. Her face was now colorless, her breath

coming quickly. "My month will be up on Monday," she said; "I shall leave you then!"

When she reached her room she locked the door and threw herself into a chair. She was trembling in every fibre, but did not weep. The days for weeping were past. She stared, dry-eyed and miserable, into the dark, wondering what she would do, where she would go in that great city, where she knew no one.

Back of her misery came memories of the peaceful life at Stratford, but even in her distress she shrank from the thought of returning and laying bare to the inquisitive eyes there the wound in her heart. The fact that the man she had trusted and loved above all others had betrayed and robbed her was a secret she could not bear to confide to another. She meant to wait until she could face Herbert himself, although she had little hope that he would ever cross her path again. Indeed, whether she should ever see him again or not was a matter of indifference. The desire for vengeance had no place in her feeling towards him; the blow had been too deadly to all her love; she only longed to forget.

XII.

THE next morning she sent out early, before the children waked, for the Sunday paper, and searched the want columns. There were no governesses advertised for save where languages were required. After much searching she cut out one that asked for a young lady of refinement and education to act as travelling-companion to a young married woman. The applicant was requested to call that day between two and three. This fact seemed to make it especially intended for her. The thought of travelling was attractive. She became more hopeful, and although feigning illness to avoid meeting Mr. Goldstein at luncheon, she did not brood over the occurrence of the evening before, but dreamed of the possibilities this new venture might hold in store for her.

At precisely three o'clock she walked up the broad steps of the house on Forty-fifth Street to which the advertisement directed her. She was ushered into an artistically arranged hallway, and thence into a tiny reception-room hung with handsome tapestries, from which she could see a wide carved-oak staircase and hall, and a handsome dining-room beyond, richly illumined through stained-glass windows.

Another young woman was sitting near her of unprepossessing appearance and wearing spectacles, waiting, apparently, on the same errand as she.

Helen looked about her at the tasteful arrangement of the room,—the tall old silver vase that stood on the table filled with American Beauty roses, the rare bits of bric-a-brac, and the paintings.

Near her, between two carved-wood columns that formed part of

the entrance to the hall, hung a handsomely framed photograph of a woman. It caught her eye, and she arose to look at it. The face was one of extreme beauty, but of a decidedly unusual type. The high cheek-bones and narrow, light eyes possessed a charm that cannot be expressed in words. The low, square forehead and beautiful hair and brows softened a rather sensual mouth and strongly moulded chin. As she looked upon it Helen wondered if this could be the woman who had advertised for a companion. It seemed incompatible with the strong self-reliance in the pictured face. She did not feel drawn to her, and almost dreaded the interview that was to bring them together.

As she stood there, the dining-room door opened and a young, shabbily dressed woman came out, followed by a maid who opened the front door for her, then asked the individual with spectacles to follow her. Helen was alone; she began to feel afraid, and her eyes returned again and again to the photograph, as though under some fascination that she could not resist. The more she regarded it, the stronger appeared to become its power, and the more she dreaded meeting the original.

Her knees trembled when, a few moments later, she rose to the maid's whispered, "Mrs. Manning will see you now, Miss."

As she entered the room every trace of fear left her. There was no one visible save one young woman sitting at the head of a handsome mahogany dinner-table, on which was a silver tray, tea-things, and a scattered pile of letters. Helen looked first at her and saw, instead of the subtle face of the photograph, one of the most lovely women she had ever beheld. The face was perfect in proportion, the eyes dark, and soft with a sort of wistful introspection that gave them the appearance of being blue, and invited trust and confidence immediately. Above the beautifully marked, wide brow a mass of soft chestnut hair grew low and was caught in a prettily arranged knot at the back. She was dressed in a simply made gown of black *peau-de-soie*, and her hair had the slightly ruffled look of one not constantly conscious of her appearance.

On beholding Helen her face brightened wonderfully; she leaned forward and touched a chair near her, as she said in a melodious English voice, "Will you sit here, please?" Then, as Helen took the chair, she added with a smile, "I know you will forgive my not getting up. I have just been sorting an accumulation of mail. Sunday is my great letter-writing day," and she touched a pile of loose letters in her lap.

"Did you get all those in one week?" asked Helen, feeling at once at her ease in the glow of this genially sweet personality.

"One week! They all came to me yesterday. I have another pile in my library upstairs. You see, I like to answer all my personal

letters myself; it seems more gracious. I know I should hate to receive a typewritten reply to a letter I had penned on an impulse of friendliness or interest; shouldn't you?"

"Yes, indeed," said Helen, somewhat puzzled to understand why she should have so many letters, and why any should be replied to by another.

"But you have not come to talk about my letters," said Mrs. Manning with a little, rippling laugh. "Is it—about the advertisement?" She touched her hair softly, and looked up under her lashes with an appealing glance that expressed a little sensitive timidity lest she might be making a mistake.

"Yes," said Helen; "I don't know what the requirements may be, and I haven't had any experience, but I thought——"

"Oh, no experience is necessary," replied Mrs. Manning, laughing again, this time somewhat girlishly, and leaning one elbow on the table, her chin in her hand, she regarded Helen with genuine interest. "What I am looking for is someone congenial to travel with me. We go on tour in two weeks, so, of course, I shall be parted from Mr. Manning for several months, and there is no one the least bit interesting to me in my company. I thought it would be a good plan to advertise, though I scarcely hoped I would be fortunate enough to find—someone."

Helen was too dumfounded to make any reply, other than an unintelligible sound. All this was incomprehensible to her. She knew so little about the theatre and stage life that she did not for an instant connect what she heard with it.

Mrs. Manning quickly discerned the bewilderment in her face. "Oh, I forgot my advertisement did not tell you who I am," she said; "I am Mrs. J. H. Manning,—better known as Constance Belmont."

Helen had, of course, heard the name since coming to New York, and she now grasped the situation with a peculiar commingling of disappointment and astonishment.

The lovely, sensitive face before her reflected her surprise.

"Are you not interested in the stage?" she asked, with a little, tolerant smile.

"Oh, yes," returned Helen quickly; "I mean—I know nothing about it. But if you are an—if you belong to it—it must be very different from what I have always supposed."

"My dear, outsiders have not the slightest idea of what theatrical life—I mean the better class—is really like. They all judge it from story-books, and by what it used to be a hundred years ago. You interest me; I think we would get on famously if we could come to some understanding."

In a few moments Helen found herself telling this woman, who

had been an absolute stranger to her an hour before, all her history; confiding even her feelings and the shameful story of her desertion, which she had never before intrusted beyond her own heart. She did not reveal her husband's name, through a delicacy of feeling that Mrs. Manning did not attempt to intrude upon by even a look of inquiry. That name was sacred to the past, and Helen had buried it with the first sweet dream of her awakening womanhood. To intrust to one she felt could understand and sympathize all she had kept so long secret was a great relief to the girl, and moved her so deeply that at one time she almost broke down, and the tears arose uncontrollably to her eyes.

Constance Belmont's eyes immediately responded, and the two sat looking at each other for a moment through their tears. She leaned over and took Helen's hand.

"You poor child," she said with infinite feeling, "you certainly have had a sad time; but don't cry—don't break your heart over it. It is awful to have had it all come when you are so young, but perhaps it is better. You will never know such suffering again. You are prepared now to meet the world, and so few of us ever are at your age. Many of us trust and trust and hope and hope until—well, until we don't see anything to hope for. It is almost better to have your ideals shattered when you believe in them, than to have them fade out of your belief."

"But you—you can't be any older than I am," said Helen, drying her eyes for the fifth time.

"Oh, yes, several years possibly," returned the other; "but I am much older in experience. Although I have always been well guarded from contact with the rougher side of life, I have known the world since I was sixteen. I have been obliged to study humanity; then I have been so closely associated with so many different types. I have heard their histories and unconsciously have noted their lives. All this broadens one; it teaches one how to value things and how to judge people. It also teaches how much there is in life that is artificial, and how much real."

Helen was startled at this moment by a man's laugh, and for the first time became aware of two men sitting back of them on a small loggia that opened off the dining-room through glass doors that were closed.

"That is only Mr. Manning and the author of his new play, Mr. Haughtly," said Mrs. Manning, noticing Helen's consternation; "they could not possibly have heard what we have been saying."

A little later Manning and his companion entered and were presented to Helen, who was persuaded to remain longer by Mrs. Manning, who saw that she was in an overstrung, nervous mood.

Manning, like his wife, was the darling of the public; not only

for his ability as an actor, which was decidedly uncommon for a man of scarcely thirty, but for his personal attractiveness.

Tall and athletic of build, with a finely poised head and strong, classical features, he seemed to have been put together expressly for the stage. His massive chin and strongly chiselled lips showed to even better advantage behind the footlights than in a drawing-room, as did also the peculiar grace of movement for which he was noted. About him there was more of the stamp of his profession than there was about his wife. He had the quiet self-possession of an embryo Irving; while she gave the impression rather of a dreamer than an actor, a woman of infinite sensibilities, which was the secret of her wonderful popularity and winning portrayal of characters.

"Fate has sent Miss Morton to me, Jack!" she exclaimed with the naïve impulsiveness of a nature both warm and untrammelled by stupid conventionalities. "She has agreed to go on tour with me."

"Ah, I am delighted," murmured Mr. Manning with the cautious reserve of a man of the world, who would like to know more before expressing himself too enthusiastically. "It will be a great comfort to Mrs. Manning to have you, Miss Morton."

"I really feel we shall be good friends," murmured his wife, with one of those half-tender, half-questioning smiles thrown from beneath her lashes towards Helen. "And you will find it amusing if you have never crossed the States."

"There is nothing I like so much as travelling," returned Helen with sincerity. "And just think, I have never been farther away from home than Bridgeport, since I was four years old, when I was taken to visit my aunt, Mrs. Dupre, in Philadelphia."

"Mrs. Alphonse Dupre?" asked Mr. Manning with interest.

"Yes, she was my mother's sister," returned Helen. "We spent two years with her there after my father's death."

"I know her quite well," said Manning. "Dupre is one of my best friends."

"How funny," murmured his wife. "You see, it was good inspiration, after all, that made me put in that advertisement, Jack."

"I shall come after this to consult with your oracle, Mrs. Manning, when I am puzzled about what to do," remarked Mr. Haughtly, who had been watching the color rising and fading in the girl's delicately chiselled face. "Your impulse certainly served you well this time."

Helen turned towards him laughingly. "How do you know?" she asked. "I might be the veriest—rogue!"

Their eyes met and exchanged mutual interest. "If you are," he said, "then I shall consider myself unworthy to longer depict human nature, since I can be so grossly deceived."

Constance Belmont smiled upon him. "Bravo, Vincent!" she exclaimed softly, "that was worthy of a Talleyrand."

When Helen took her departure Mrs. Manning accompanied her to the front door.

"We have only just moved in here," she remarked, glancing about the hall that seemed to Helen to be in perfect order, "and we are not yet half settled."

They paused near the door, and Helen's eyes fell again on the photograph that had so interested her. "Do you know," she said, smiling now at her groundless fears, "when I first came in I thought that was you."

"I! Why, it doesn't look a bit like me!"

"I know; but I hadn't seen you before, you know, and I imagined that it might be a photograph of the person I was to see."

"That is the beautiful Mrs. Tinsley Burton, a leader of the Smart Set here. You have probably heard of her."

"No—and yet the name does seem rather familiar," returned Helen thoughtfully, and trying to recall where she had heard it before.

"Oh, her name has been in the papers constantly; if you read the New York society news, you could not miss seeing it."

Helen laughed. "But I never read it," she said.

"Neither do I; but I have been entertained by her several times, and hear of all she has been doing. This is her house. She has gone to Europe for two years, and rented it to us just as it was."

"Oh," remarked Helen, as she laid her hand on the door-knob that Herbert had so often touched even in those days while she loved and trusted him in the little apartment in Brooklyn, "it is certainly beautiful."

An unaccountable depression was beginning to settle upon her. She attributed it to the fact that she was obliged to leave this new friend and return to the hated abode on Lexington Avenue.

"You must come in to see me to-morrow sometime," said Mrs. Manning as they parted; "come about four, if you have nothing to do, and dine with me; then we can go over to the theatre together. You have never been behind the scenes, have you?"

"No, I should love to go!" said Helen, flushing slightly with pleasure at the thought.

When Mrs. Manning returned to the dining-room her husband made her a sweeping court bow. "Permit me to apologize for criticising your advertising venture," he said with dramatic humility.

"Isn't she lovely!" exclaimed Constance, looking from one to the other with a beaming smile as she took her place again at the head of the table, pulling the arm-chair close in, with a sort of girlish ardor.

"She is beautiful!" said Haughtly enthusiastically.

"Oh Vincent, control yourself, my boy; don't let your susceptible heart run away with you, as usual!" cried Manning as he lolled back, with hands locked behind his head, and looked smilingly at the playwright.

"And she is so refined," said his wife.

"What a Christina she would make in my new play!" ejaculated Haughtly.

Manning was now thoughtfully blowing smoke towards the ceiling. "What a fine Cecelia she would be for me in place of Miss Watson!" he remarked.

"That's right, both of you immediately plan to take her from me!" complained Constance half laughingly. "Well, you just can't have her. I found her, and she's mine!"

The men laughed. "She is too tall for Cecelia, Jack," said Haughtly, still clinging to his own idea, "but she would make a most perfect Christina."

"Oh, a few inches more or less wouldn't matter," returned the other quite as seriously; "stage characters can grow, you know, if they wish to."

"You might just as well both stop calculating upon her," said his wife with genuine seriousness, "for you shall not have her!"

Manning stood up and stretched his arms. "Well, I'll see to it that Vincent does not get her," he said, smiling. "If it is to be either of us, I'm the man!"

His wife looked at him with raised brows. "Well, I call that jolly impudent!" she observed scathingly. "Jack, your vanity is something enormous!"

"It will engulf him soon," said Vincent, who had also risen, "and we shall hear of the great Manning no more."

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Manning as her husband bent to kiss her.

"I am going to beard the wolf in his den," he replied playfully. "Harding is having a conference with Herman in an effort to do me out of my lease of the theatre. Belonging to the great tribe of wanderers, he does not observe the Sabbath, and while the city prays, he and the Trust conspire against an innocent Christian!"

"You mean they haven't given up the fight yet?"

"Not they! They are tenacious. Do you know that the Trust hired men to have everyone of my new posters destroyed? There is not one left on any wall in the city or Harlem."

"But how can they break your lease? I thought it was secure?"

"So did I. But they have bribed someone in my employ to repeat something I said about wanting to get out on the fifteenth as verbal evidence that I broke the lease."

"What piffle!" cried Constance indignantly. "Oh, I wish some-

one with money would crush this Trust! It is making a mere trade of dramatic art."

"Wait till we find a few more independent spirits like our Jack here," said Haughtly. "The Trust won't have a leg to stand on! But they're all afraid to lose the almighty dollar, that's where the trouble is. Look at the time the whole country should have mourned for McKinley; there wasn't another theatre but Jack's closed on Broadway, even the very night of the crime!"

"Well, there are many disadvantages in being one's own manager," said Manning quietly, "but there are also some advantages, and one is that a man is not forced to sacrifice not only art, but individual principles to the avariciousness of others. They have done everything under the sun to overthrow me, even to the meanness of duplicating my play; but, thank Heaven! the American people still have their independence. Why, even the critics are losing power over the public because they hold remuneration higher than justice. Look how they tried to down me! But they failed; the whole lot put together failed!"

"Yes, and it is the grandest tribute the public has ever paid art," said Haughtly feelingly. "It gives one an incentive to do good work."

"Jack, don't get into trouble with Herman," pleaded Constance, who followed them into the hall with an ornament taken from the dining-room to be placed, as she thought, with better effect on a table in the hall. "You know he will do anything he can to injure you."

"No, dear; don't worry," returned Manning; "there is nothing he can do. I shall meet him at his own game."

XIII.

ON Monday Helen said good-by to the Goldstein household forever, and, after installing herself in a small boarding-house room on Thirty-first Street, she went to Mrs. Manning's, as she had been invited to do. She was asked to go straight up to the front bedroom, where she found Constance, with the help of her maid, hurriedly getting into a walking-suit.

"I am so glad you came," she said, smiling at her over her shoulder. "I've had so many people here this afternoon that I have scarcely time to dine and run to the theatre. Eugenie, is that right?" she added to the maid. "Should this thing look crookedly like that?"

As Eugenie arranged the matter, Constance pinned her hat on nobbily, with a backward tilt of her head and a glance in the mirror, then turned to the door.

"Have you dined?" she asked, pressing Helen's hand, and added, as Helen replied that she had, "Well, you won't mind sitting with me while I have a bit, will you? I'm afraid I am going to be jolly late!"

Her dinner was laid at one end of the big dining-table. It was

simple, but served most attractively on delicate china by a noiseless maid.

"Mr. Manning dined at the club to-night," she continued, "and I always forget everything about dinner if he is not here. I really believe if it were not for the maids I would go without. I hope you don't mind being hurried?" she added as she started for the front door. "You know it would be rather serious if the star should be late!"

She sped down the brown-stone steps like a deer, and ran to the corner for a car that was then in sight. Helen followed, breathless. It was all so different to the life of a star as Miss Elison had described it to her. There was no extravagant dressing, no paint, no jewels, no carriage; only a pure-minded, simply dressed, beautiful young woman, as conscientious in fulfilling the duty she had undertaken as any governess might be, and too much in love with her art to care about the petty dissipations of society.

On leaving the car they walked half a block, and arriving at a dark little door set in under the steps of an adjoining house, they pushed it open and passed through two bare, dingy rooms furnished with a bench, a table, and two colored posters of Mrs. Manning.

The star's room was on the right, three steps down. Although a small room like the others, it had been draped by some of her many friends in light-blue cheese-cloth. One entire wall was covered with the congratulatory telegrams received on her opening night, the other with souvenirs of tributes sent her by admiring audiences. Her maid, who generally accompanied her, but had been sent on ahead this evening, came forward to help her. While being undressed the star covered her face and neck with cold cream; then, wiping it off, began to make herself up with rouge and colored pencils. It was all so unlike what Helen had been taught to expect. There was no disagreeable element, no flowers, no men clamoring at the door; everything was quiet, everyone deferential and obliging.

During the performance Helen was taken in front. The play charmed her; the applause of the audience thrilled her as though she herself were the beautiful, daintily garbed maid of the sixteenth century that Constance Belmont impersonated.

She joined in the enthusiastic applause involuntarily, her pulses leaping with a touch of the energy that had left her in that black hour of her awakening in Brooklyn.

"Well, what is your opinion of a star's life, so far?" asked a clear, genial voice at her side. She looked up, and beheld Vincent Haughtly's handsome face smiling upon her.

"Oh, I am captivated," she replied. "I am stage-struck!"

Haughtly's eyes responded to the life in hers; he took the vacant

seat beside her. "Really?" he said, with evident satisfaction. "Why, I imagined you were rather averse to it."

"Oh, no; I was only ignorant. It seems to me a great art. I should love to go up there and portray some character just as I feel it, and know that my interpretation was appreciated by an audience like this. Oh, it must be splendid!"

Haughtly watched her admiringly. "It is only a momentary fancy," he said; "you see the beautiful outside, the enjoyable harvest of much labor. There are years of drudgery back of each little part in these scenes that appear to run along so smoothly and easily."

"Of course," Helen responded. "Everyone who succeeds has that back of him—even a pianist."

"Yes, that's true; but the stage needs physical and mental labor combined; it necessitates absolute self-command and entire attention."

"But there is more to work for," returned Helen. "The life is so full of interest and—possibilities, I should think."

He regarded her hesitatingly. "Would you be willing to go through the drudgery to become a star?" he asked.

Helen looked surprised. "What do you think?—that I am very lazy and unambitious?"

"Oh, no, only—you don't look like the style of girl who would aspire to this sort of thing."

"I have always so misunderstood the stage. It is far more interesting than I ever imagined. I think it would be a splendid way to—lose oneself."

Haughtly laughed. "To lose oneself?" he repeated. "Surely you have no ambition to do that."

Helen looked away; her beautiful profile, the slight drooping of her mouth, expressed a secret sadness. He wondered what it meant, what grief could have come to darken her life so soon.

"You might make a great success on the stage," he said after a moment; "you have everything to your advantage."

"I have a friend who used to tell me that so often," returned Helen, smiling as she remembered Miss Elison's arguments, "but I never considered it a possibility."

"If you ever should consider it, I wish you would come to me," said Haughtly gently, "I think I might be able to help you."

"Are you serious?" she asked.

"Perfectly; I am more than serious; I am interested."

His eyes expressed more than interest, and Helen avoided them. They were fine eyes of a rich, golden brown; they had appealed to her the moment she first met them fixed upon her in genuine interest at Mrs. Manning's house. She had never known a man with the same charm of intellect, the same sincere gravity, and it soothed her to feel

that such a one should find her entertaining, although she took no personal interest in him. To her the whole sex was represented by Herbert, and through him had lost attractiveness. To him she had given the best her young nature could offer, only to be ruthlessly sacrificed. Suffering had outgrown romance; she looked for no more.

After that evening a new thought gave interest to her days, the thought of working towards an aim that held more promise than anything she had before dreamed of. She longed to lose herself in an absorbing occupation, in an ambition that would help her to forget the past. The more she thought of it, the more impatient she became to take Mr. Haughtly at his word and make the attempt. But trouble had given her a distrust of promised happiness. He might only have spoken in an impulse of friendliness. She could not believe that any real intention had instigated his words.

Yet the following Sunday afternoon Mrs. Manning pressed her hand significantly, as she greeted her from behind the tea-table, and whispered, "I have something to tell you, dear, something interesting. You must stay and dine with us."

There were eight or ten persons gathered about the Star, which rendered explanation impossible,—composers, artists, and literary men. Even to sit silent and listen was sufficiently interesting, but Helen was immediately drawn into conversation with Mr. Rinot, a retired actor from the German stage and a dramatist of note. Helen had attracted him the first day when he bowed before her in formal acknowledgment of Mrs. Manning's introduction. He seemed rather gruff, especially in an argument where he had stormed and gesticulated. He was a typical German thinker with a touch of the eccentric. Well built, shoulders considerably bowed from study, his beard and hair touched with silver, the kindness of his blue eyes concealed behind glasses, he presented an interesting though somewhat brusque personality.

Helen soon saw beyond his glasses, and the tender heart that lay beneath, the keenness of perception that commanded confidence in all for whom he was willing to exercise it.

"I think there are great chances for you," he said, "and if Vincent Haughtly takes interest in you, your future is made."

"Why? He is not a manager, is he?"

"A manager!" Mr. Rinot struck his brow with dramatic fury and laughed contemptuously. "Ye gods of Olympus! that's good! That's very good!" then, turning upon her, he added more gently, "He is the foremost dramatist of this country. At this present time he has a play in four different theatres here. Do you think a mere manager has much more power than he? My dear young lady, he could put you to the top in no time. Very simple!"

"But do you think I have any ability?" Helen was already flushed with enthusiasm.

Rinot twisted, shrugged his shoulders, and grunted. "Ugh! that remains to be seen. If you will exercise much effort, and much determination, you are bound to accomplish something, eh! Very simple!"

"But I have so little courage; I should never be able to walk before an audience, much less to say anything."

Rinot leaned forward and struck one hand with the other. "Very good!" he exclaimed in a low voice of intense gratification. "You could not have a better attribute. The bold women do not make the great actresses. They have no temperament. The actress needs temperament and intelligence; very simple! If Mrs. Manning is willing to give you up, I will be very pleased to coach you a little. I will do this for you because I like you, ech!"

"Oh, will you?" said Helen delightedly. "If I could only take this up seriously, I would put all my life into it."

The German smiled. "Until the prince comes," he said; "oh, yes, until some young fellow comes along, then you will give yourself to him 'for better or for worse'! Oh, I know you!"

Helen lifted her hand appealingly. "Oh, no, not that," she said.

"What! have you had enough of them already?" asked her companion with an amused twinkle.

"Yes, quite enough. But do you think Mrs. Manning will consent? You know I am engaged to travel with her."

"I know. There's the rub! She is so delighted in finding such a charming companion, that she may not be willing to part with you. But she is generous, she has a good heart, and seeing this fine opening for you, she will no doubt release you and get someone else! Very simple."

At this moment Mr. Gotweld, a celebrated composer, went to the piano to improvise quietly. Mrs. Manning sat near in a large arm-chair, her chin in her hand, her eyes fixed in dreamy satisfaction upon vacancy, as she listened to the strange, suggestive melody his fingers awaked.

"Isn't it wonderful," murmured a young author to Helen when the musician ceased. "The making of music seems something absolutely apart from physical conception."

His words aroused Helen from melancholy dreaminess.

"It certainly is not material," she returned; "I feel it stirring something within me that I never knew before."

"The mystery is how one man can create melody that means so much to others, even to those like me who haven't the slightest bit of music in their whole anatomy."

Helen laughed. "And it comes so easily to him, his fingers seem to do it without the control of thought."

"It is probably a musician's medium of thought. You know when a beggar asked alms of Mozart, and he happened to have no money about him, he would write him a minuet that could be sold for hundreds of francs."

"Mozart thought melody," said Rinot in his abrupt way. "Even when a boy he remembered and wrote down correctly Allegri's 'Miserere' after hearing it once at the Sistine Chapel."

When the composer had departed, Mrs. Manning approached Helen and took her hand.

"Come, I want to talk to you," she said, and added to the others, "Mr. Rinot, take our young scribe into the dining-room; Mr. Manning is there and will give you something to cheer you." Then, with mysteriously suppressed glee, she led Helen into the little reception-room, now vacated, and confided to her that she had had a talk with Mr. Haughtly, who had asked her to resign Helen to him. "I recognize that the chance is a very great one for you," she continued, "and we finally came to an agreement satisfactory to both—you are to enter my company as one of the gypsies. In this way we will travel together, and at the same time you will be gaining experience and stage confidence."

Helen was so delighted she could scarcely speak coherently. "But how shall I ever have the courage!" she exclaimed, after expressing her pleasure and gratitude.

"Oh, you will have nothing to say," returned Mrs. Manning. "You just run on and make a noise with a lot of others. After a little while you may be sufficiently confident to take the part of the old woman, Fortunita, who has only seven words to say; and both Mr. Haughtly and I think you might work up into a good part by the time his new play is put on next winter."

"Oh, thank you," said Helen, pressing the warm, sympathetic hand between hers, "you certainly have been good to me, and I shall work so hard to try to be worthy of your interest."

"Well, my embryo star!" said Manning later, in his genial, whole-hearted way on finding Helen and his wife still talking confidentially after the others had departed, "how does a dramatic future appeal to you?"

"I am simply beside myself with happiness!" returned Helen gleefully; "nothing could have been proposed more acceptable to me at this time, and I am going to work hard."

"Good!" Manning patted her on the back encouragingly, "and if Vincent Haughtly does not treat you well, you come to me; I am

ready to fight for you. After witnessing that duel in the 'Bride of Senico,' you know I can fight. Here's my hand on it."

He extended a strong, finely moulded hand, and looked down upon her with the grave smile so characteristic of him and so much more expressive than words. "There is nothing to prevent your rising now; all you need is pluck and perseverance."

XIV.

THE winter was one of intense interest to Helen; she enjoyed every hour of their travels. Even the one-night stands in little out-of-the-way Western towns amused her greatly. The drudgery was absolutely ignored—it was welcome. Romance for her was a thing of the past; her ambition was fired, and under the control of it she forgot the sorrowful ending of her first love-dream. In Constance Belmont she had found a kind, intelligent, and sympathetic friend, and her one regret was that they would before long be obliged to part.

Her absorption in the work she had undertaken enabled her to conquer quickly her native timidity, and in a short time she was given the second role in Mrs. Manning's company. In this she began to attract considerable attention in the West because of her unusual beauty, although this was placed somewhat at a disadvantage when compared with the star's recognized supremacy.

The following summer months Helen spent in the city studying under Mr. Rinot, who had undertaken to prepare her to play the important part of Christina in Mr. Haughtly's new play, with the understanding that she was to reimburse him for his time and pains only when she could do so conveniently. During that time she enjoyed no association; she buried herself in work, living in a tiny hall room in a boarding-house, and going daily to her teacher.

The Mannings were spending the summer in Europe, and she did not expect to see them before September. To this month she looked forward impatiently, anxious to know what her friends would think of her advancement, and half fearful of the day when she was to appear on the stage for the first time in New York.

As it turned out, she was not in the least nervous, and her drilling had been so thorough and correct that she won much applause for her conception of the part and for her beauty, which was praised by newspaper critics.

After a short time letters came to her from people in the audience expressing their appreciation of her work, and from photographers inviting her to their studios for sittings, and for two successive weeks she had received a box of gorgeous violets sent anonymously every evening.

Mrs. Manning amused her greatly by recounting, one Sunday, the

exaggerated admiration of a young society beau whom Constance knew, and who had made one of Helen's audience every night since the play in which she took part had first made its appearance.

"He is coming here this afternoon, Helen," she exclaimed with a bright laugh, "and I believe it is he who has been sending you those anonymous violets. So prepare to meet your fate."

"My fate," said Helen dryly. "I think I met that in you. I certainly am not looking for anything better."

Constance's eyes, always so responsive to her feelings, softened tenderly. "Oh, there is a lot of happiness in store for you yet," she said, "but I shouldn't consider it a good thing for you to marry Bobby Featherstone; he is too fast."

Helen's heart leapt as she heard that name. "Featherstone!" she exclaimed, "is that his name?"

"Yes, Robert Featherstone. Why? Do you know anything about him?"

"No; except—that was the name of a great friend of—my husband. And I am sure he used to call him Bob."

"How funny! You may hear something of your husband from him. It would be a strange coincidence."

Helen arose. "No," she said, "I don't want to meet him. That chapter of my life is closed; I have no desire to reopen it."

"But, my dear, if he has never seen you, he will never guess who you are."

"I know, but—he might speak of him. I couldn't bear it."

Mrs. Manning followed her to the door and took her hand. "Dear, do you still care?" she asked, seeking to read the truth in the girl's face.

Helen raised her head. "No, not in the least," she said. "All I can feel is anger; and yet the very fact that everything connected with that episode is hateful makes me dread anything that will recall it."

"I know how you feel, dear," said Constance, "and I shall not attempt to keep you, although I did want you to meet the Oakleys. Be sure you come in next Sunday."

As Helen turned to the front door Mr. Manning's secretary hurried across the hall with a letter.

"Mr. Haughtly asked me to give you this, Miss Morton," he said. "It was brought by a messenger to the theatre last night after you had left."

"Thank you, Mr. Hobbins," said Helen; "I hope it isn't—why, this is from——" She stepped more into the light to examine the superscription, which was familiar, although she could not at once place it. At the same moment the front door was opened to admit Mr. Featherstone, closely followed by Mr. and Mrs. Oakley.

"It is too bad! there is no escaping now," whispered Constance.

"Come in for a moment. I shall try to keep the conversation from the subject you dread."

"This is great luck," murmured Featherstone after the introduction. "I had scarcely hoped to meet you here, Miss Morton. This is a red-letter day, for in it I have realized one of my dearest ambitions." He was looking about the same as in the days when he and Herbert were such close friends, although somewhat stouter and more bloated. He watched her with insinuating attentiveness.

Helen made some unconsidered reply; his proximity annoyed her, and, in addition to this, she was puzzled over the handwriting on the note she was now prevented from opening.

Mrs. Manning took them into the little reception-room, where afternoon tea was served, and Helen seated herself near Mrs. Oakley. Featherstone, however, refused to see any wish to avoid him in her action, and drew a chair close to her.

"I have had a seat in the front row ever since the night you opened," he whispered. "I wonder my silent prayers did not reach you through mental telegraphy."

"Probably because my mind is always too occupied to pay attention to any one individual," returned Helen indifferently.

"Are individuals of no account to you?"

"None—except as units to make up an audience."

"You are encouraging!"

"Did you expect to be the only unit?"

"I long to be. Will you let me try?"

Helen realized she had made a false step. "Individuals do not exist for me," she said sweepingly. "I look on humanity as a whole—a body whose applause I seek."

"You have had mine since the first moment my eyes beheld you. I even ventured to bestow upon you a silent tribute of my admiration. May I continue it?"

"The violets?" she asked.

"Will you permit me still to send them? The slight communication will be more of a joy, now that I know you accept them from me."

"So far my maid has enjoyed them," said Helen. "I never accept anything sent anonymously."

"But now,—will you accept them now?"

Helen was spared replying by the entrance of a very handsome young woman, fashionably gowned in pearl gray, and wearing the air of a social pet. The instant she looked at her she was thrilled by some recollection. The narrow gray eyes falling upon her seemed to see through her, yet Helen instinctively drew herself up with a slight inward quiver of animosity.

"Mrs. Tinsley Burton," whispered Featherstone as he arose to greet her.

A moment later Helen was acknowledging the introduction through which Constance made her known to the newcomer.

"I can only stay a moment," said the Widow in her peculiarly attractive voice; "just stopped in to let you know I had returned."

"When did you arrive?" asked Constance. "I had no idea you were on this side."

"I got in Wednesday. Shall only be here a week, as I have promised to spend the rest of the season in Washington."

"Is your flame with you?" asked Featherstone later, with the boldness of one who feels pretty sure of his ground.

Mrs. Burton raised her straight brows very slightly.

"My flame?" she said. "Do you mean Bert? Oh, no; I lost him somewhere on the Continent. He is such a persistent boy; I found him rather in the way."

"Why, I heard he was in town yesterday," said Featherstone in surprise.

"Very probably," returned Mrs. Burton; "I believe he followed in the next steamer. You know, I suppose, that he made quite a little fortune at the games in Monte Carlo?"

"No, I know nothing about him," returned Bobby coldly.

"Oh, I forgot you two had quarrelled." Mrs. Burton laughed lightly. "Well, he had phenomenal luck—almost broke the bank, in fact. Now he is doing his best to spend the money and wreck his health at the same time."

Helen heard this conversation indifferently; to her the name Bert conveyed nothing, and her thoughts were occupied trying to place the handwriting on the note Mr. Hobbins had given her and which she held unopened in her lap. Suddenly it came to her, and with it the memory of her ever-true friend, Sam Monroe, with his strong, grave face and stalwart form. She wondered how he had discovered her and why he had written.

"Do come in Thursday evening after the theatre," Constance said to Mrs. Burton as the latter was about to depart, "and bring your 'Bert' if you wish. It's me lord's birthday, and we shall have a jolly time. You must come too, Helen, and you, Mr. Featherstone. It will be a surprise party; me lord is to know nothing about it."

"I am afraid there will be a fisticuff if Bert and Bobby are brought together," laughed Mrs. Burton, "so I had better decline for him."

"Oh, no, bring him," returned Constance. "This will be a feast of the passover,—everyone must forgive his enemies!"

"Very well, if you are willing to take the consequences, I shall bring him."

"There is no danger," remarked Featherstone curtly. "We are gentlemen, I hope."

"Yes, modern gentlemen," replied the Widow, "which is no guarantee against rudeness. How do you like the house, Constance?"

"I am charmed with it," replied Mrs. Manning. "Your coming makes me anticipate with grief the day we must give it up."

"Oh, no, you need not fear that; I sha'n't want it for years yet. It is a relief to be rid of that tortoise-feeling of having one's house always over one."

Constance laughed. "I haven't had a home long enough to be tired of it yet," she said. "It is a delightful sensation to remain even a winter in one place."

Helen took advantage of Mrs. Burton's departure to take leave herself, being possessed with an unconquerable curiosity to read Sam's letter. As she arose Featherstone asked to see her home, but she declined, giving some plausible excuse which, though perfectly polite, made it clear that she did not want him. She walked quickly along the darkening streets, impatient for the privacy of her rooms, where she might peruse the note uninterrupted.

XV.

SAM's note was brief and characteristic; it stated that after much futile searching he had by a mere chance recognized her on the stage the previous evening. He begged, in the name of his loyal and unchanging friendship, to be allowed to see her as soon as possible, as he had much to tell her of home and much to ask her.

The straightforward, manly tone of the note brought the tears to Helen's eyes, with a vivid memory of this man who had been so kind and patient in the past. She held the page for an instant to her face, seeing the wide, calm fields of Stratford again, the red chimneys of the Monroe place, the slender pines in the background. She seemed to breathe the perfumed airs of summer, to hear the rasping cry of guinea-fowl as she pushed through the box-wood that divided the two places. She saw Sam crossing the lawn to greet her as he was wont to do in those far-off days, his strong face lighted by a tender smile whose meaning she had then refused to recognize.

As she mused the tears ran down her face, and, almost blinded by them, she wrote a hurried line to Sam asking him to come that evening. This she dispatched by a messenger, then, after a hurried dinner, dressed to receive him.

The two years had brought more alteration to Sam than to her. He appeared much older and more developed; his face had acquired a distinguished seriousness that added to its manly attractiveness and expressed the good intellect back of his steady blue eyes. He was dressed entirely in black.

"I have had a long search for you," he said after they had ex-

changed the first words of greeting, "and had almost given up in despair—though I meant to find *him*."

"The people at home," said Helen hurriedly, "how are they? Tell me about them."

"What I have to tell will shock you," said Sam gravely. "Father heard of—Herbert in London; the truth came to us both at once. It broke his heart."

Helen caught his hand, her face paled. "You don't mean——" she said in horror as her eyes surveyed his black clothing.

"Yes; he died inside of a month. Later I went to London, trying to trace Herbert,—to hear something of you; while I was away mother followed him."

"Oh—Sam." Helen bowed her head upon his arm and sobbed bitterly. "If I had only known! I might have made it easier for them," she said. "But I thought—I thought it was better to conceal everything,—that perhaps you all would never know."

"I felt it in my heart from the very beginning," said Sam hoarsely. "That night when they told us you were gone an awful depression settled down on me like a foreboding of evil, though my worst fears never pictured anything so horrible as the truth."

Helen looked up and dried her eyes. "It was fate," she said softly. "Perhaps if I had not suffered as I did then, I never would have made any success of my life. Now, as I look back, I only regret it all for your sake, and—the old people. My heart aches for them, Sam. If only I could have done something to lessen their sorrow."

"Nothing would have lessened it but a proof of their son's innocence," he returned solemnly. "Could you have given them this?"

Beneath the keen glance of his honest eyes Helen's fell. "He left me," she said quietly, "I could not deny that; but—there may have been conditions that none of us know of."

"Can you attempt to defend him?" asked Sam, with a strange commingling of scorn and wonderment.

"The thing is past; it does not belong now to my life," replied Helen. "He killed the child he married; he never knew me as a woman. I can judge him with the coldness of a stranger; I can even be generous, because it all means nothing to me now."

Sam watched her attentively. "He left you," he said gravely. "Is that all?"

"She did not reply at once, for though she had been expecting this question, she hoped he would not ask it. "Tell me, Helen; I want to know the truth," said Sam, and his voice quivered with the emotion that possessed him.

Helen sought to avoid the question. "Was that not enough?" she

asked. "What worse could a man do his wife than desert her in the first month of their marriage?"

Sam's eyes did not leave her face. "I have a suspicion that he wronged you in another way," he said in a scarcely audible voice, "and I must know. He had no money, yet he went from you to Europe." He leaned nearer and clinched his hands nervously. "Helen, tell me. I can't stand this suspense any longer,—did he rob you?"

Helen's heart seemed to stop. Never before had she allowed the matter to take such shape in her mind, but now she was forced to view the crime in its reality. She suffered only for Sam, the agony of suspense in his face was pitiable, and by her reply she sought merely to spare him.

"Nonsense, Sam; why do you think such things," she said. "He—may have gone with friends."

"No, he had money with him. I learned that beyond a doubt. Where is yours, Helen? Prove to me that you have it, and I shall believe him innocent. Prove it to me! God knows I want to believe it!" He started up and crossed the room excitedly, with hands clinched and head bowed. "I knew it," he continued bitterly, accepting her silence as answer, "when I saw you were working for your living; when I recognized your brave little face in that glaring false atmosphere facing the crowd fearlessly, courageously, in spite of all the wrong done you; oh, I knew it." His voice broke hoarsely, and he paced a moment in silence. As Helen watched him the savage determination in his white face frightened her, and yet she could not but admire the strength expressed in his every movement. He appeared much too big for the little room; his head towered to the chandelier, his impatient footsteps made ornaments on the table quiver. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon him; he was muscular and broadly built, but not heavy.

"We cannot judge him, Sam," she said softly, "his life was so different from ours. He was thrown into that reckless, gay life, there—"

Sam turned passionately. "Judge him!" he exclaimed. "I shall leave that to the justice of the law. Now is his hour of retribution, and if he lives I shall find him and drag him to the punishment he has escaped too long."

Helen rose and laid her hand on his arm. "Sam, don't talk like that," she said gently, "it doesn't sound like you."

He looked into her beautiful upturned face, and a spasm of feeling crossed his own. He tried to avoid her. "You can't expect me to be as great as you," he said with deep feeling. "Your soul is a thing of heaven; you can forgive, but I cannot, and will not."

Helen followed him. "What have I done?" she said appealingly. "Do I deserve punishment? Have I not suffered enough, Sam?"

He drew a deep breath. "Oh, yes, I know you have, I know," he said, "but he must not go free any longer; it is an outrage to justice!"

"Sam, in punishing him you punish me," said Helen. "To drag this thing up now before the public will do no good, and it will hurt me very much. His punishment will come; he will bring it on himself."

As he looked into her pleading eyes Sam's face relaxed. "Do you mean that you wish him to go free?" he asked,—“this fellow who has wronged you so greatly? You love him still enough to forgive all this?"

"Love him!" repeated Helen sorrowfully. "I have too great a contempt for him even to desire vengeance. He infatuated my childish fancy; his treachery awoke me suddenly. I am now a woman, on the threshold of great success. I don't want him to ruin me again, therefore I wish to forget."

Sam's head hung low, he stared at the floor. "Yes, I see," he said. "You are right. I can only pray God that he is never brought again across my path."

In his lined and colorless face Helen read the bitter anguish of those two years that had so prematurely aged him. Remembering his generosity towards Herbert in the past, his self-effacement even when the secret of his great, silent love had escaped him unawares, she could not but respect his righteous anger. Her heart ached for him, and the frozen current of her sympathies stirred with something of the old girlish tenderness as she realized how good he had always been to her since the days of her childhood.

"Sam, don't let it worry you any more," she said. "I am happy now, and your father and mother are not here to worry over it. Who would be benefited by punishing him?"

"I know," he replied more gently. "If you don't wish it, Helen, of course there is nothing to be done. No doubt he is punished enough in his own conscience. He can't hold his head up here in his native country. Yet I have a suspicion he is here now."

"In New York?" exclaimed Helen. "It can't be!"

"A friend of mine said he thought he saw the notice of his arrival in a paper; but I can't find any trace of him, so there must have been a mistake."

"Are you living here now?" asked Helen.

"Yes, I am settled here as district attorney, a place I've been working for for nearly two years."

"That is splendid! I always felt you would succeed, Sam,"—she held out her hand to him,—“and I do congratulate you. If any man ever deserved success, you do."

Sam took her hand between his, and his color deepened slightly as he looked upon her with a quiet smile. "Success is such a complex word," he said. "I used to be able to define my idea of it, but some time ago it slipped from me. Now I just work because—it seems the best thing to do."

XVI.

ON Sunday evening, after the theatre, Helen went to Mrs. Manning's, as she had promised. She would not have missed that birthday supper. Manning had been so kind and had taken so much interest in her progress, in spite of the great odds against which he was struggling to retain the place he had won in the public's heart. She knew the storms he had weathered, the false lights in which he had been placed since he first dared to strike out for himself and be his own manager, and she honored him for the courage he had shown.

Featherstone, who occupied his accustomed seat in the front, sent Helen a note between acts to ask if he might escort her to the Mannings'. It was the first of his many requests she was willing to accede to, for although the man did not appeal to her, she thought it might appear better in the eyes of Mrs. Burton, concerning whose opinion she was secretly anxious.

On entering the Mannings' house she was called by Mr. Manning, who was sitting in the reception-room with Haughtly and another man whom she did not know. Featherstone proceeded to the dining-room, where Constance was already surrounded by guests.

As Helen turned back she heard Mrs. Burton's clear voice say laughingly, "Well, Bobby, did you bring your beautiful Christina with you? Bert, when you see her draw no comparisons, for—Now, puppies, don't glare at each other as if——"

The remainder she lost, for Haughtly had risen and was presenting her to Carl Burlington, one of the most progressive and important managers in the profession.

"Miss Morton," said Haughtly, "in fairness to you Mr. Manning and I thought it best to tell you at once of the proposition Mr. Burlington has come to make me in your behalf. He is putting on a new production the middle of this season; he considers the part particularly suited to you and offers to star you in it."

Helen flushed and looked quickly from one to the other. "This winter!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, Miss Morton," said the manager, "the play is one of unusual merit by Gastro, will be produced at the Empire, and is bound to make a hit."

Helen's heart quickened; she turned to her two friends. "What do you think?" she asked.

Haughtly was fingering an ornament on the table; he did not look up, leaving it to Manning to reply.

"Of course, it is an unusual opportunity," said the latter, "if you think it wise to make such a precipitous leap."

She looked with brilliant eyes upon the manager. "Do you think I would be capable of it?" she asked.

"Yes, we are certain of that," was the reply. "The part is as though it were expressly written for you."

"But what would you do, Mr. Haughtly?" said Helen, a cloud crossing her face. "It would break right into the middle of your season here."

Haughtly smiled sadly. "I don't want to stand in your way," he said. "Mr. Burlington is a friend of mine, and he is offering you a great chance which I should not want you to lose through me."

"But our contract binds me to you the full year."

"Yes, I know. But we couldn't foresee a thing like this. It is a chance that would come only once in a lifetime,—if once, to one who has been such a short time on the stage."

"How good you are! Then do you wish me to take it? Do you advise it?"

"I am afraid to advise for fear personal ambition may influence me."

Helen turned to Manning. "What do you think?" she asked.

"Well, if you want my sincere opinion, I should say, don't take it," returned Manning in his decided way. "It will not be an advantage to star you in the fall; you couldn't do better than that."

qui vive to find fault. The critics will be prejudiced, and even if you do your work above reproach, they will think it necessary to consider you raw. Haughtly is writing a play for you now in which he means to star you in the fall; you couldn't do better than that."

She turned beamingly to Haughtly. "Are you?" she exclaimed. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I was keeping it for souvenir night, as a sort of birthday gift," he said, smiling.

"Oh, I am delighted!" exclaimed Helen, extending her hand to him. "No, I must decline your offer," she added to Burlington, "tempting as it is, and I thank you very much."

"I could offer you some inducements," said the manager, smiling. "Of course, I wouldn't do so against the wishes of these two friends, but they have given me permission."

"I appreciate your goodness, but nothing would persuade me. I owe everything to Mr. Haughtly and Mr. Manning, and their advice will always guide me."

"Well, you've won, Haughtly!" said Burlington, patting the dramatist-manager on the back. "I thank you, however, for giving me the chance."

"I thank you, old man, for your consideration," returned Haughtly, "and I more than appreciate your decision, Miss Morton."

"Well, come in and pledge me an easier year than the past one," said Manning jovially, as he strode towards the dining-room, "'Come, fill the cup that clears to-day of past regret and future fears.'"

They followed him, laughing.

"Well," exclaimed Constance, "who was victorious?"

"The man with the most self-satisfied expression, of course," said Manning, looking at Haughtly.

"Well, you are that one," returned his wife, and everyone laughed save the man sitting behind Mrs. Burton.

He had sprung to his feet as the three entered, and now stood like one petrified, his face ghastly, his eyes fixed upon Helen.

She did not see him until Constance said:

"Helen, I think you know everyone here except Mr. Monroe. Mr. Monroe, Miss Morton is the young comet we have been speaking of, whom managers are clamoring already to star."

As Helen looked into that white, emaciated face, marked almost beyond recognition by the reckless dissipation by which he had for two years sought to deaden his conscience, her pulses stopped an instant, the room darkened before her eyes. She quickly steadied herself against the back of a chair, and by sheer force of will regained control.

"Are you feeling badly, dear?" asked Constance, who noticed her face pale, as did Haughtly, who went to her at once and offered his arm.

"Oh, no," she replied, throwing her head back, "only—the excitement of—this flattering interview has been a little too much for me. If you will give me some wine—thanks."

"I have heard laudations of you on every side, Miss Morton," said the Widow, "and I want to add my little tribute, your Christina is simply perfect."

"Thank you," said Helen quietly. She was looking into her glass, while through her mind was passing the conversation she had heard when last she sat in that house with Mrs. Burton. It all came to her clearly now; she understood that the "Bert" of whom this woman had spoken with such contemptuous proprietorship was the man who had duped and degraded her, whom she had married in the innocent good faith of her love.

Conversation continued in the same light vein about her, but she heard nothing. Her blood was running hot and cold in quick succession; an anger such as she had never considered herself capable of was quickly gaining mastery of her.

It was for this woman that he had left her? For her he had stooped to his contemptible crime!

She heard the Widow's cold, clear voice above all others; it lashed her like a whip-cord. She dared not lift her head; she felt she must hold herself in check against some outburst that would reveal all to her unsuspecting friends, and create a scandal that would fly like wild-fire abroad.

Unconsciously she listened for his voice, dreading it, yet curious to hear it.

Since she had entered the room Herbert had not uttered a sound. Unnoticed by anyone, he remained standing, though all the others were seated, genially talking and drinking toasts. Like a spectre at the feast he stood back of them, his eyes fixed upon Helen, his attenuated form stiff as a corpse, his hands clinched.

Constance, ever considerate of others, turned to toast him, holding her tall glass of sparkling champagne gleefully in air. The shock of his appearance was so great, it slipped from her fingers and crashed upon the floor.

"Mr. Monroe, what is it? Why do you stand?" she asked in startled tones. Everyone's attention was at once attracted, and Helen looked up.

As Herbert's eyes, fixed upon her with that strange stare, met hers he uttered a wild shriek and shrank back in an effort to escape her.

"Take her away!" he cried. "For God's sake, take her away!"

The men sprang up and seized him, thinking him intoxicated. Every face blanched; even the women had started from their chairs, trembling as they watched the struggling group.

"It's just like him to come here in this condition," growled Featherstone as he seized Herbert's arm. The latter clung to him like a terrified child.

"Take her away!" he groaned again, then fell in a heap to the ground laughing hysterically, and babbling unintelligibly in helpless lunacy.

"He isn't drunk," said Manning quietly. "Help me to get him out of here; he is suffering from some nervous collapse."

"It's a bad case," whispered Burlington. "I saw a man taken this way before, though there was reason then." He glanced curiously at Helen.

Mrs. Burton was watching her closely, her eyes almost closed, like those of a cat waiting for its prey to approach. The delicate, artificial coloring of her face showed distinctly against its sudden pallor, and although she was the first of the women to regain composure, she was obviously much affected.

"He seems to be afraid of you, Miss Morton?" she said, with a slight interrogation.

Constance looked at the girl in bewilderment.

"Yes, Helen——" she began, but as Helen swayed slightly, as though about to faint, she hurried to her. "Dear, you are ill," she said. "What does it all mean?"

Mrs. Burton returned to her chair, a cold smile curving her lips. "It is the most extraordinary affair I ever witnessed," she remarked.

The words brought Helen to her senses. She drew herself up. "It has unnerved me terribly," she said quietly. "The performance was trying to-night; I was not in a condition for—anything like this."

"But have you ever met before?" persisted the Widow, still watching her. "My curiosity is intensely aroused."

Helen became suddenly calm; she looked coldly into the narrow gray eyes.

"Why are you curious?" she asked. "Is he anything to you?"

Mrs. Burton's eyes wavered. "Anything to me? I don't understand," she said frigidly.

"I cannot consider my curiosity any less presumptuous than yours," returned Helen with equal hauteur; then, laying a hand on Constance, who stood near her, she added, "You will forgive me if I go, dear, won't you? I feel quite ill."

Her hostess went with her to the reception-room to get her wraps.

"This is awful," she said. "I wonder if it means an evil omen to Jack."

"Oh, no; it only means an evil omen to me."

"To you! What do you mean?"

"I mean—— Oh Constance, that man is my husband!"

"What!" Mrs. Manning stared. "You don't mean it!—Mr. Monroe?"

Helen looked dry-eyed into space as she fastened her furs. "He seems so little like the man I married, the being who filled my life like a god so long! Poor wretch! What he has come to!"

"Do you feel none of the old sentiment?" asked Constance.

"I feel only pity—intense pity," said Helen sadly. "Heavens! to think what he has come to!"

"I wish you would stay here to-night," murmured her friend. "I don't think you are in a condition to be alone, Helen."

"Oh, yes, I am all right. Where did they take him?"

"I don't know, probably to his home."

Catching sight of Mr. Hobbins, who was crossing the hall, Mrs. Manning called out to him, "Do you know where Mr. Manning went, Mr. Hobbins?"

"Yes, he and Mr. Featherstone went to the hospital with Mr. Monroe," was the reply. "He was in such a condition that both thought it best to accompany him."

"Where is Mr. Haughtly?"

"He is outside with Mr. Burlington. They are coming in now."

"I don't wish to see them just now," said Helen hurriedly. "Mr. Hobbins, will you send for a cab for me, please?"

"There is one outside," returned Hobbins. "If you will permit me, I will be glad to accompany you."

"Thank you, yes," returned Helen, and added to Constance, "I know where to find Mr. Monroe's brother. I shall send him a note immediately, so he can go to him. Good-night, dear."

"Good-night; let me hear from you to-morrow." As Haughtly and his companion appeared Helen shrank back of the portières, and Mrs. Manning took them into the dining-room, where the Widow still sat alone, and apparently not very well pleased by an event which had left her both puzzled and humiliated.

XVII.

HELEN saw Sam many times during that winter and the following summer. Through his able efforts she succeeded in obtaining a divorce from Herbert, who had become permanently deranged, and had been removed to a private sanatorium. It was found that he had run through the fortune acquired at Monte Carlo, and every dollar of Helen's fifteen thousand. Sam, however, was making a good income and took upon himself all Herbert's expenses for the remainder of his brother's life, refusing to accept the assistance that Helen offered.

The latter's life was moving rapidly towards the zenith of success. The play Mr. Haughtly had written for her was one of uncommon merit and interest. Helen entered into it with all her heart and mind; she fairly lived the part, and on that momentous night when she was to make her first appearance as a star, so engrossed had she become in the character she was to portray that she wholly forgot for the time her own individuality.

The house was crowded, for Helen's beauty was now universally recognized, and her rapid ascension to stellar heights had attracted much attention.

Her reception was even more enthusiastic than she had looked for; bursts of applause greeted her, and expressed the audience's appreciation at every good touch she made. After the first act the theatre rang from pit to gallery with thunderous and sustained plaudits; superb floral offerings were presented over the foot-lights until the stage appeared like a garden of bloom.

Helen knew that incomparable joy experienced only by those who succeed in the art they love. In that hour of triumph all sorrow of the past was forgotten. She moved like one in a dream. The hand-pressures of sympathetic friends and congratulatory voices were scarcely appreciated by her whirling brain. Two hundred telegrams

had reached her, many from people she had never met, all expressing enthusiastic congratulations and encouragement. Among them was a tender, manly note from Sam, who asked the privilege of taking her home after the performance. Although several others sought the same favor, she granted his request, for in her joyousness none other seemed to appeal as did he.

The Mannings were giving her a supper that night, and she had had a beautiful gown of pale blue crepe de chine sent her from Ducet for the occasion. At this supper were to be several great lights in the dramatic world, first and foremost among them Madame Sarah Bernhardt, for whom Constance had an absorbing admiration.

"No words could ever express to you how much your success means to me," said Sam when they were in the carriage, "and yet my selfishness destroys to me the joy of it."

"How, Sam? Selfishness was never a characteristic of yours." Helen smiled as she spoke, and laid her hand on his. "Why do you always try to make yourself appear unworthy?"

His face was pale; she could see its stern, handsome outline in the gloom, and felt his hand quiver slightly under hers.

"I have never told you what you probably have guessed long ago," he said in the restrained, deep tone of strong feeling. "My love for you has grown up with me—it is part of my life. Always you have been beyond my reach—now more than ever."

For an instant Helen could not reply. The intense meaning in those words seemed to charge the atmosphere about them with some significant force; she felt it tingling in her veins. It was the force of a love that had become part of this strong man; a strength on which, unrecognized, she had depended since her earliest childhood.

She lifted his hand and laid her cheek upon it.

"Oh Sam, I don't know how to answer you," she said softly. "There is no man—no, and there never was and never could be—whom I honor and love as I do you. I have had brilliant offers, as you know, in this past year, but there is no other man on earth but you whom I would be willing to marry if I could even contemplate marrying anyone. But my art absorbs me now. I am wedded to it; no other influence could usurp its place."

There was an instant's silence; she heard Sam draw his breath deeply; his hand closed upon hers.

"I know," he said with evident effort at self-control, "I was wrong to speak. But—Helen, if you ever get tired, if the glamour of success ever palls upon you and you should desire the love and protection of a man, will you come to me? I shall wait for you forever. Will you believe and trust in my love always?"

There was so much manly courage in his voice, so much generosity

in the restraint he had put upon himself, that Helen longed to throw her arms about him and give way to the wave of tender feeling that possessed her. But this she knew would not be wise; it was necessary for her also to exert self-control.

"I promise you," she said softly. "When that day comes, Sam, it will be because my love for you has conquered my ambition."

The carriage stopped; his hands closed warmly over hers, but he said nothing.



THE FLOCK IN THE MEADOW

BY MILDRED I. McNEAL

IS this not Palestine, the ancient country,
And are not these the shepherds in the fields,
Watching their flocks by night?

See how the quiet sheep come gathering
In gentle, shadowy companies,
Stirring often, like fields of innocent flowers,
In the soft Orient wind,
Appealing, one to another, silently
Against the mysteries of the falling dark,
Until the starry quiet comes over them
And deepens, and the wind dies, and they sleep.

Upon us, lying in the fields in all the dim,
Strange beauty of the night, there comes,
Out of its time, like a lily in the dark,
A little promise of dawn,
Increasing wonderfully into the very west,
Exquisitely growing and soon fulfilling itself
In the full tranquil glory of a star
That trembles with some unannounced joy.

Surely it is the ancient, sacred country,
And the dark shepherds in their dewy cloaks,
And the gray flocks, arisen, are looking forth
For the nativity.

DINNERS OF FIFTY YEARS AGO

By Mrs. E. S. Bladen



SERVING dinner in courses is comparatively a modern fashion, first introduced in diplomatic circles in Washington, D. C., and imitated from France. Up to the date of President Polk's administration the course dinner among Americans had made no further progress than that of serving fish and soup separately. Soup was regarded as such a foreign frippery that a note written by General Winfield Scott, in which he explained that he was "just sitting down to a hasty plate of soup," covered him with such ridicule as to materially contribute to his defeat as a candidate for the Presidency. Soup in the early days of the Republic was considered as food for invalids or poor people only; later, when the social splendors of the Court of the Empress Eugénie attracted rich Americans in flocks to Paris, French table manners and customs pushed the old English dinner-fashions to the wall. It is doubtful, however, if soup ever found a place on the dinner-table of the wealthy Maryland or Virginia planter, unless green turtle, which was really a stew, might be so called.

The object of an old-time dinner-party was to eat, whereas that of the course dinner is to delight the eye rather than the palate, and yet who will say that the sight of a well-filled dinner-table, where an array of silver covered dishes gives forth a bouquet of appetizing odors, fails to make an agreeable impression on all the senses.

In 1852, while still a school-girl, my father took me to Washington, where I was invited with him to dine by Mrs. Robert J. Walker. Mr. Walker was then Secretary of the Treasury. The hour was six P.M. There was no fish; soup was served in plates, no tureen being on the table, which was set with roasts at either end and intermediate covered dishes of vegetables and sauces. Decanters of wine were upon the table, and the colored man-servant handed around the dishes. When the substantials were removed the table-cloth was also lifted and the desserts served on the polished mahogany. In the centre of the table there was a china plateau with the bonbons then in style. These were wrapped in ornamental papers, which were beautifully hand-painted, but the contents were hard squares of colored sugar. These bonbons were designed for souvenirs, and the host complimented the ladies

by picking out what he considered especially pretty or appropriate for each. The desserts consisted of pastry, puddings, and fruit; fresh figs sliced in wine were especially delicious. Black coffee in small cups followed the dinner.

At this time I was also invited to dine by Mrs. William M. Meredith. Hon. William M. Meredith had been Secretary of the Treasury during the short administration of President Taylor. My father, Cornelius Darragh, was Attorney-General of Pennsylvania, with the power of appointing his whole three hundred deputies. He was a man of great influence and many friends wherever he went. The Meredith dinner was more elaborate, but on the same lines as the Walker dinner. One night at President Fillmore's reception, where Daniel Webster was the most striking figure in the Blue Room, he asked my father if he could not bring me informally to supper. The date was fixed, and at ten P.M. we arrived at the Webster mansion, which, like all Washington houses at that time, was very unpretentious. The supper consisted of roasted oysters and roasted potatoes, with the usual condiments. There were three or four great men present, and the point that most impressed me was that the brilliancy of their conversation and grace of their manners made me forget that I was a shy girl of fourteen.

My father was much occupied during the day, and Mr. Pendleton, of Virginia, used to bring his carriage and horses and drive me around to all the points of interest. He had been United States Minister to Peru, and had brought home with him several Peruvian boys to be educated. These and four nephews he had living with him were so lively that Mrs. Pendleton could not endure their noise, so Mr. Pendleton built a house for them across the street, but, notwithstanding these commodious quarters, the whole eight used to flock around Mrs. Pendleton out of school hours and follow her when she went out to walk.

But to return to the dinners of fifty years past. Three years later, when in Philadelphia with my father, I was invited to dine at the house of Hon. Richard Rush at his country-seat, Sydenham, where he resided with his daughters, the Misses Maria and Cassie Rush. Hon. Richard Rush had been United States Minister to England and France successively, and had also lived much in the former country as Special Agent or Commissioner of the United States. He was one of the Regents of the Smithsonian Institution. He was the eldest son of Benjamin Rush, who signed the Declaration of Independence. His whole dinner-service was of solid silver. There were covered dishes and meat dishes, tankards and stands for the decanters, also silver labels for the same. At one end of the table there was a saddle of venison, which Mr. Rush carved himself; at the other end a salmon, which was served by a man-servant in livery while the host was carving. Mr. Rush took wine with each one of his guests, and so far from it not being etiquette

for a guest to drink his or her own health, it was a terrible breach of good-manners not to sip from the glass at the same time as the host. Mr. Charles Ingersoll, Senior, took me in to that dinner. He was a stern and stately looking gentleman, but the versatile and enchanting conversation of Mr. Richard Rush soon relieved my embarrassment.

A year later the first exclusively ladies' dinner was given by Mrs. George Plitt to Miss Harriet Lane, niece and adopted daughter of Hon. James Buchanan, later President. At this time Mr. Buchanan was United States Minister to England and Miss Lane was going out to join him. This dinner in her honor was given on Mr. Plitt's birthday. There were twelve young ladies at the table with the host and hostess. There were oysters on the half-shell, a fine salmon, and the most delicious game and vegetables. Flowers decorated the centre of the table. There were ices, omelette soufflée, various desserts, and the usual decanters and light wines were served from the sideboard—positively no soup. The Plitts lived in a small house on Walnut Street below Eighth, but they were famous for their dinners.

The first course-dinner I was at in Philadelphia was at Mr. and Mrs. Richardson's, on Walnut Street below Nineteenth, a three-quarter house which stands there yet. Mr. Richardson was president of the Bank of North America. This was a young people's dinner, given by his son and daughter. The latter married the then British Consul, Mr. Kortright. It was there I first met Lucy Jones, who later became celebrated as a journalist as Lucy Hooper. Her father was immensely rich, but all his estates were in the South, and the War of the Rebellion ruined the finances of the family.

To return to the dinner. It was in every sense a superb scene. The table was a mass of flowers, glass, and silver. A great pyramid of poinsettias and japonicas rose almost to the ceiling. Every plate was an art-work, and all the courses were served. After oysters there was soup, then fish, then game of all kinds, terrapin, canvas-back ducks, etc. There was no wine on the table, champagne being served almost continuously. This was understood to be a French dinner, the gentlemen leaving the table at the same time as the ladies, immediately after the coffee.

I was at two balls and many receptions at Madam James Rush's Chestnut-Street mansion, but Mrs. Rush did not invite young girls to dinner-parties; in fact, in those days young girls had a perfect horror of dinner-parties, and it was only under some peculiar pressure of circumstances that they could be induced to go to one.

Perhaps the most elegant dinner-party of those days that I attended was given by Colonel William Croghan at his country-seat of Picnic, a few miles outside of the city of Pittsburg. Colonel Croghan was the father of Mrs. Captain Schenley, who gave the magnificent park which

bears her name to the city of Pittsburg. Her father used to spend much of his time with his daughter in London, and on his return was in the habit of giving a series of sumptuous dinners.

Eight o'clock was the dinner-hour, the number of guests twenty-four, the flowers and grapes the product of his own forcing houses. Three golden candelabras holding wax lights stood upon the table, which bore two great roasts and many silver covered dishes. He carved the great wild turkey, holding it on a carving-fork until all the meat was deftly sliced off. Two servants quickly filled the Sèvres china plates, each of which was embellished with the portrait of a reigning king or queen, while other servants in livery carried around the silver dishes with their savory contents. The guests sat at table three hours; this did not seem long, for the time was occupied with interest in the novelties, such as souvenirs for each guest, black Hamburg grapes when the snow lay on the ground, fragrant hot-house flowers, and flowers carved out of vegetables. The japonicas carved from turnips and beets compared favorably with the natural flowers. There were decanters on the table.

In those days the family dinner-table was as prodigally provided, though on a smaller scale, as that for invited guests. I never saw a meagre table when I was a child. As this is a record of modes of living a half century past, I take the picture of my maternal grandmother's household. She (Mrs. Dr. John Simpson) was born in Maryland. She married at the age of fifteen and moved to Southern Pennsylvania. After the death of her husband she resided in Pittsburg, and in the arrangement of her table always followed the old-time Maryland style. At one end there was always a roast ham, at the other end roast beef or fowl, often a saddle of venison; four vegetables, with sauces and condiments; always an elaborate dessert. There were always four cut-glass decanters on the dinner-table and many delicacies, but never soup. Breakfast and supper were also hearty meals. The first included broiled beefsteak, fresh fish, lamb chops, and various styles of hot cakes. Supper was more delicate,—fried chickens and waffles, game, sweet-breads, and peas. At breakfast there was often Welsh-rabbit; neither this nor ham was regarded as food, but merely as an appetizer. My paternal grandmother, who lived to be nearly ninety years of age, told me she had never failed to eat broiled beefsteak for her breakfast since her earliest recollection. Her father had been one of the first settlers, and she was the second white child born west of the Allegheny River; the first was Colonel William Robinson, who became the first president of the Pennsylvania Railroad. There were plenty of Malaga grapes and some oranges and lemons, with all kinds of dried fruits, which came to us from New Orleans, as did sugar, coffee, tea, etc., and there were great old warehouses where furs, buffalo robes and tongues, and all sorts of good things were stored.

Cincinnati was quite as sumptuously supplied as Pittsburg. In the fall of the year great flocks of turkeys were driven through the streets, as were thousands of pigs. Profusion of food was the characteristic of the first half of the last century. Servants were also abundant and efficient as cooks and laundresses, but there was probably not as much expected of them in the way of dress and culture as at the present day. There were no canned goods, no baking powders, no chemical extracts, —everything was prepared in the household.

All over the country there was the most generous living. I visited the Dandridges, the Merricks, and the Hollingsworths of Maryland, the Hains, Schoenberghers, Neffs, Cassadys, and other families in Cincinnati as a school-girl, also at Governor Crittenden's in Lexington, Kentucky, with my father, and there was always the same profusion of table delicacies and elaborate and elegant table furnishing. At Governor Crittenden's an orchestra of colored musicians played during dinner.

But perhaps the best test of social embellishment was to be seen at Saratoga Springs, where the old United States Hotel assembled in the season the wealth and fashion of the country. The great dining-room, resplendent with mirrors and gilding, showed a dinner-table covered with silver dishes, while behind every two chairs a colored waiter man was stationed. The major-domo (as head waiter) stood at the head of the table with a baton in his hand. Orchestral music ushered in the guests, who took their seats at table; the major-domo raised his wand, and each waiter man advanced and stood back of the guests; at the second wave of the wand the waiters laid hands upon the dish-covers, and at the third wave every cover was lifted and laid upon small dumb-waiters, which other attendants carried away. Then the major-domo laid his hand upon his heart and bowed to the guests, the music struck up, and the waiters served the dishes.



SUMMIT AND VALE

BY ALICE MOORE DUNBAR

THE light hangs over the mountain top,
But gray and misty the plain;
The sun's a-glow on eternal snow,
But down in the valley, the rain.

And life is so, the sun a-glow
On the mountains far, while the rain's below.

THE ATTACK ON THE CHAISE

BEING AN INCIDENT IN THE LIFE OF
DICK RYDER, OTHERWISE GALLOPING DICK,
SOMETIME GENTLEMAN OF THE ROAD

By H. B. Marriott Watson

Author of "The Princess Zenia," "The Heart of Miranda," etc.



I HAVE had ever an eye for a doxey, and in the course of my life have happened upon a variety of the sex such as falls to few men. Some have been fine ladies, brave with their lace and powder, and others again have descended upon a scale to the common kixsy-winsy; but in the end I would wager Polly Scarlet against any of the pack. Yet I will confess that there were some that have mightily tickled me, and one or two that went near to turn my head for their looks alone, to speak nothing of their state and grace. Not but what I have long ago learned the measure of beauty, and how far it may go—a man is a fool to surrender to that on the summons; yet will I not deny how greatly it stirs the midriff, and, coming home so sharp, does thus affect the bearing of us all. Madam or Miss, there was no handsomer lady in town on that summer night when I encountered her than Sir Philip Caswell's ward, and 'twas that, I'll be bound, influenced me in my behavior subsequently. Nevertheless, I vow I did not care two straws for the pretty puss in my heart.

'Twas after a long evening at a gaming-house in Marylebone that I was returning on my two legs through the fields for Soho. I was in a pleasant temper, having filled my pockets with King's pictures, and I had drunk nothing save a bottle or so of good burgundy since dinner. The hour, indeed, was past midnight, and I was casting up the chances to find supper at the Pack Horse or the Golden Eagle or some other house known to me. "Well," says I, as I came out in the hedgerows, "'tis nearly one, and rip me if I do not sup and lie abed by two, and live virtuous," for I was pleased with what I was carrying and loath to lose it. A bird was calling in a flutter from the hedge, and just upon that another sound came to my ears, and on the still air arose the clamor of swords in engagement. This was nothing to me, for I am not used to intermeddle in such affairs as nocturnal brawls, unless, indeed, I am gone in liquor, as sometimes happens, or am led off by

troublesome company. But to the sounds of the fight succeeded the voice of a woman, crying, but not very loudly, for help. This, as you may believe, was upon another footing, for there was never a petticoat that appealed to Dick Ryder in her trouble in vain, as my records will prove on any road in England. So off I set at a run in the direction of the sounds, which seemed to stream out of the entrance to Windmill Street. The houses here were black and silent (it being so late), and there was no sign of any interest on the part of the inhabitants of the quarter. But the moon, which had been under a scurry of clouds, struck out of her shelter and showed me plain the scene of the struggle. There, in the roadway, stood the body of a chaise, with two trampling horses, while about it was a melly of figures, two of which were engaged in hammer-and-tongs upon each other. It was not long ere I had seized the situation and interpreted it properly, and, whipping out my blade, I made no ado about falling on the assailants of the chaise. 'Twas easy to make out who these were, inasmuch as one of the men wore a mask across his eyes. I ran upon him and those behind him, while I was aware of the woman's cry that still issued out of the chaise but now suddenly stopped.

"Stand aside, damn ye," says the man in the mask on perceiving me. "Would you interfere with an honest duello?"

"Rip me," says I, "call you this duello with bravoes behind and a lady afore? Rot me if I split not your liver for it!"

At that I lunged, but on that same instant the scum about him came at me from the side, so that I was forced to keep my eyes and weapon in two places. The man in the mask had not ceased to ply his point on the gentleman whom I took to be the owner of the chaise; and this seemed a sturdy, obstinate fellow enough, for he puffed and grunted hard at my ear, but fought like any dragoon. One of those that came at me I winged in the arm, and, swiftly dodging behind my ally, I came upon the masked man and ran him through the elbow without advertisement. He dropped his arm with an oath, and, as he did so, the mask fell from his face, which showed clear and clean in the moonlight. But that was no sooner done that the big man by me lurched and staggered, so that it was plain he had taken something in his vitals. Well, here was I now all alone with that evil pack about me, pressing on me like birds of prey, for although I had pinked one and his master, there were two more able-bodied culleys left, to say nothing of the master himself, whose wound, to judge from his language, was more painful than serious. I am quick at a resolve, and know when to withdraw from in front of odds. There was a man fallen wounded, and maybe dead, and no signs of the watch; while from the chaise peered, as I caught a glimpse, a white and terrified face in the moonlight. The coachman, it was clear, had taken to his

heels already, and the horses stood, champing and trembling and swaying in their alarm at the noises. What does I, then, as there was a little lull in the fray and the others temporarily drew off, but stoop and lift the big man from the ground, and bundle him rapidly into the chaise. Bang goes the door, and, leaping to the coachman's seat, I lashed the horses with the flat of my blade. They started in a panic, and the chaise went plunging and rocking down the narrow way.

This fetched me into King Street, and, in fear of a pursuit, I stood up and banged at the nags so that I had them bumping at a gallop round into the Oxford Road and on the way for Tyburn. When we had run some distance I brought 'em to with an effort, and, hearing no noise of the enemy, descended and opened the door of the chaise. The moon shone sufficiently for me to make out the humped body of the man I had thrust in so roughly, and opposite, white, shrinking, and in an evident state of terror and agitation, a mighty handsome and engaging Miss that stared at me helplessly.

"Is—is he dead?" she asked hoarsely.

"Faith, Miss," says I, "I cannot say. Yet I hope not. He's not for worms, I'll warrant. Best get him home and have a surgeon fetched; and if you'll acquaint me with the house, I will make so bold as to take you myself."

She waited a moment and then spoke, giving a street in St. James's, at which I made her a congé and got upon the box again. I am better astride a nag than with a whip in my hand, and, moreover, the night was now pretty dark, yet 'twas not long ere we had reached the house, and, the bell rung and the servants called, the fat gentleman was got in safely enough. Upon that someone flies for the surgeon, and there was I all alone with the lady, and not loath to clap my peepers on her more nearly. She moved with a style, but had a fearful air, yet it was her face that took me most. She was young and slender and nothing too tall—large-eyed and round of limb, and with a mouth that budded in repose and opened like a flower in speech. But she was very still and white just then.

"I am Sir Philip Caswell's ward, sir," she says very tremulously, "and we are much beholden to you."

"I am honored, Madam," said I, with a congé again, "to have been of some small service to you."

"The scoundrels fell upon us by Windmill Street upon our way home," she continued with a pretty shudder. "Sir Philip stepped out to face them. I begged he would not, but he is very obstinate."

"Faith, Miss, what could he do less?" said I.

"We might have whipped up and so escaped them," says she, with an air of some petulance now, "but that our cowardly man took to his heels and left us helpless."

As she spoke she eyed me with more coldness, I thought, than the occasion warranted, for all she was so shook, and though she had made me her compliments quite prettily, she had spoken as if she were thinking of something else, which, as you will conceive, nettled me not a little. It was as if she wished me away, for she fell silent and cast glances at the chamber clock that hung at the wall. But seeing I had been at the pains for her and the old fat man, why, says I to myself, rip me if I will go like any discharged lackey. I will tire her out, says I, and let Beauty yawn or pay in gratitude. So I sat on in the saloon, making conversation as it seemed fit to me to serve one of her class and age. No doubt she was tired, for the hour was about two in the morning, yet her pretty yawns, which she feigned to cover with her hands, vexed me. But, indeed, I might have gone forth and left here there and then for very shame, as would have been natural, had it not been that an excuse came to aid me in a message from Sir Philip, who had recovered under the attentions of the surgeon. He had learned, it seemed, that his rescuer was in the house, and begged that he might be allowed to thank him in person presently. This set me in feather, but Miss in the sulks, as I thought, which maddened me the more that the hussy should prove so ungrateful, particularly at a time when she should be showing concern at her adventure or, at least, grief for her guardian. Yet as I watched her, perish me but she charmed me with her petulant prettiness the more. Such a dainty head and a mouth, so pert and alluring, I had never yet clapped eyes on, which I say for all that followed.

There, then, were we set awaiting Sir Philip, in the big chamber, she yawning without disguise, and me racking my wits to attract her. I'll warrant she must have taken an idea of me as a buck of town, although she feigned coldness then. I spoke of the play and the Court, of both of which I knew secrets, and I talked on a level proper to the sex.

"D'ye not love the play, Miss?" says I.

"Lard, it is pretty well," says she, and covered up a yawn with ostentation.

"I doubt not but you have seen 'Love in a Tub'?" said I, for I would not be beat by her impudence.

"Maybe," says she; "I have a poor memory."

"There was one played in it t'other day like to you, Miss," said I with significance, thinking to rouse her.

She lifted her eyebrows. "Well, indeed," says she indifferently.

"As handsome as I might wish to see—so she was," said I, persisting.

"Why, do you say so?" cries Miss. "What a fortunate lady!" and stifles another yawn.

"You favor her, Miss," says I, giving her an eye.

"Lard, I favor none, sir," said she tartly. "I am cross like two sticks that could beat myself," and ere I could find a word in retort she had gone from the room.

If I had followed my first temper, I would have marched from the house forthright, being sore to be so used by the minx; but I will admit she had a fascination for me, and wherein my teeth are set there I hold; so that I paced the chamber once or twice and "Damme," says I angrily, "I will make the little cockatrice sing another tune afore I've done."

And no sooner was I come to this conclusion than the door at the foot of the room opened, and in walks an elegant gentleman. The sound made me turn, and I watched him till he came into the light of the candles, when I cried out sharply—for the face was no other than that which had lain behind the mask in that nocturnal attack. I took some steps across the room and halted by him, so that he might see me as clearly as I saw him.

"Well, sir," says I, "I'll make bold to say you recognize me," for I was amazed and disordered by his remarkable appearance in that house.

He looked me up and down. "Not the least in the world," says he coolly, and arranged some nice point of his sleeves. "Who the Devil may you be?"

"Rip me," says I angrily, "the question is not that so much as who be you and what audacity brings you here? But if you want it, you shall have it. My name is Ryder."

He paused again before he replied to me, and there was no manner of irritation in his voice, but merely languor.

"Well, Mr. Ryder, one good turn deserves another. So, my name is York, and I am a friend of Sir Philip Caswell."

"What!" said I, mightily taken aback at this rejoinder, as you may suppose; then I laughed, "'Sblood," I said, "'tis a pretty demonstration of friendship to be for striking your bodkin in someone's belly, as you was an hour ago, you rogue."

York's eyebrows lifted at this, but I will admit he had a fine command of himself which took my admiration, toad as he was. He was a healthy, ruddy man, of looks not displeasing

"Indeed," says he to me; "why, here is news. Have we Simon Bedlam here, Madam?" and he turned to Miss, who had entered at the moment. He bowed very low to her, and the color sprang in her face.

"Mr. York!" she cried in a fluttered way.

"Why, you did not look for me so late, Madam," says he pleasantly. "But I spied lights and thought maybe Sir Philip was at his cards

and would give me welcome, and the door was open. But I find only," he concluded, with an indifferent glance on me, "a merry-andrew who talks brimstone and looks daggers."

"Sir Philip has been attacked," stammered Miss; "the surgeon has just left him."

"'Tis not serious, I trust?" says the fellow gravely, and when she had faltered out her negative continued, very polite, "Footpads, I doubt not. The streets are abominable in these days, and the watch is ever asleep."

But that was too much for me, and I burst forth:

"Footpads!" said I. "Hear him, Miss. Why, damme, 'twas the dungfork himself. The mask fell from his face as he fought me and I saw him plain. I would have you and Sir Philip know what manner of man this is who calls himself friend."

"Softly, softly, you crow loud," said he, as impudent as ever and smiling softly. "Who, d'ye suppose, would credit this cock-and-bull story? I profess I know none. Would you, Madam?" he asked, turning suddenly on the girl.

She hesitated ever so little and showed some confusion.

"I—I think the gentleman mistook," said she; "I cannot credit such a story. 'Tis monstrous!"

"Why, Miss," said I, "'tis true as I am a living man. And as for this muckrake here, why, I will prove it on his skin, if he denies it," and out I whipped my iron, ready for an onfall. But it seemed that he would not budge, and smiled as indifferent as ever. And Miss too, though she showed no color, regained her composure, and says she firmly:

"'Tis monstrous! I cannot believe it. This gentleman is a friend to me and Sir Philip. He is on terms of intimacy. Lard, sir, you surprise me to make such rash statements. Your eyes deceived you, or the dark."

The man that called himself York nodded impudently. "That is it, Madam," he says, "'twas his eyes, no doubt, and the blinking moon. This gentleman, whom I have not the honor of knowing, is doubtless much excited by the event and must be excused. Otherwise"—he shrugged his shoulders significantly. "I am honored by the resemblance he detects, and, my faith, I shall be seeing my double kick the Triple Beam—so I shall, and damn him for a rogue."

But you may guess that this was too much for me—to stand there quiet and see the culley talk so suave and false, and the girl so credulous, and perilling herself and the house by blind faith in such a villain. Upon his features, moreover, there was a faint grin that spread and counterfeited civility, almost, as it were, a leer, and that maddened me, so that I spoke out pretty hotly:

The Attack on the Chaise

"'Tis very true what you say, sir," said I, "and there was no witness of what happened save me and old Oliver, the moon. And so the law shall go free of you. Indeed, I have no particular fancy for the law myself. But damme, sir," says I, "I detect a mighty resemblance in you to a wheedler that cheated me at dice this night, and rip me if I will not run you through the midriff for it!"

There was my point towards him, with that little menacing twist of my wrist such as has served me often in good stead, and he must ha' seen what sort of kidney he had to deal with; for he gazed at me in surprise, laughed slightly, and made protest with his shoulders, exhibiting some discomposure.

"I would remind you, sir," said he, "that there is a lady here."

"Damme," says I, "but she will not be outside, then, and thither you shall go!"

York frowned at this, and stood for a moment as though he was at a loss for answer. I was not to be put down by a naughty fop like him, with his punctilios, more especially as I was acting in the interests of the lady, so I pressed him with the naked blade.

"Come," says I, "let's see your tricks out-of-doors."

But at that a voice broke in and stayed me, coming from the door behind.

"Pray, sir," says this very level and quiet voice, "what may this scene mean?"

Round I whipped, and there on the threshold of the room was the tall, big man that had fought by me, Sir Philip himself, with his arm in a bandage, a cap on his iron-gray hair, and on his face a stern, commanding expression. Out of the tail of my eye I saw Miss shrunk back against the wall in a posture of alarm. But York was no whit abashed; he saluted most ceremoniously.

"Good-evening, Sir Philip," said he, "your servant. You are come in time—perish me, in the very nick! Here's a most impudent and amazing case," and he cocks his finger at me. "I have never heard of a more shameless, audacious fellow. Damme, it has made me laugh—so impudent is it!"

"I should like to know what it is, Mr. York, so that I maybe might share the jest," says Sir Philip with some dryness of tone.

"Why, naturally," returned t'other cheerfully, "having had the good fortune to rescue you and your ward from a pack of villains, cutpurses, or worse, what is my surprise to find installed in your house the very chief of the villains, as impudent as you please. Faith, if it were not so grave 'twould tickle me still."

I must admit that the fellow took me aback, and for all I was furious, I could not but admire his cool bearing and ready wit. Sir Philip stared at me with a black frown, for I could find nothing for

the moment to counter this monstrous brazen face, but at last I broke out, only with an oath, for sure—so amiss was I.

"You damned rogue!" said I.

But York goes on as calm as ever. "'Twould be a good thing, sir," says he, looking at me with a kind of a wondering interest, "if perhaps the watch were called; for he is a man that can use a weapon, as your arm bears witness, and, indeed, my own skin too," with which he stroked his elbow gently. Sir Philip had come forward and now began in a formidable voice of anger.

"What!" he cries to me, "you are the ruffian——"

But I was not going to put up meekly under this, and broke out myself.

"Rip me," said I, "if I have ever heard or seen the like! Why, yonder stands the fellow that was in the assault on your carriage, and 'twas me, Dick Ryder, that thrust him through the elbow as he fell on you."

Sir Philip's eyes went from one to t'other of us under his bent black brows, but York's eyebrows were lifted in a feint of amazement.

"Why, Sir Philip," said he, "you will see from this how an excess of impudence may move a man. It may be that he is drunk that he plays so wildly. You have known me long. Sure, I needn't speak in my own behalf to so preposterous a charge," and dropped silent with a grand air.

"I have known you long, as you say, sir," said Sir Philip slowly, "and I have known you to be a suitor for my ward's hand."

"I have always had that honor," said York with a bow towards Miss, "which, unhappily, you have not seen fit to allow me so far. Yet if my witness is wanted, why, here is your ward herself."

At that Sir Philip turned, as though reminded.

"Lydia," said he, "what is the truth of this story? We were attacked and rescued. Was this gentleman in the assault?" and he pointed at me.

Miss's eyes fell; she was fluttered and her bosom went fast; and there flashed, I'll swear, a glance from York.

"Indeed, sir," she faltered, "I could not say. The men were masked."

"Aye, so they were," said he, considering.

"'Twas from this one's face that I took the cover," puts in York pertly.

"But certain it is that Mr. York rescued us," went on Miss in a faint voice.

At that news I could have reeled under the words, so little was I ripe for them, and so unsuspicious of her.

"Why," said I, opening my mouth and stuttering,—“why, 'twas I

drove off the pack and fetched the chaise home. 'Twas I lifted you in and took the reins. The Lord deliver me from this wicked puss!"

Sir Philip threw up his sword arm with a gesture of black wrath.

"'Tis plain," said he, "that one here is a villainous rogue, and if we have not always agreed, Mr. York, at least I cannot think you that."

Miss leaned against the wall, white and trembling, and I gave her a congé, very deep and ironical. Truth to say, as soon as I had recovered I had, after my habit, begun to ply my wits pretty sharply, and already I had taken a notion of how things stood between the two. Moreover, I was not done with yet, and I cast about to be even with the pair. Sir Philip, it seemed, was hostile to the addresses of this York; and as patently Miss herself was not. The attack, then, must have been part of a plan to gain Mrs. Lydia's person, to which she was herself privy. What does I, then, but step in and interfere with the pretty plot? This was why she bore me no good-will, no doubt.

"Well," says I, with the congé, "I cannot contest a lady's word, be she Poll or Moll. Let the gentleman have his way."

Sir Philip without more ado turned to him.

"Mr. York," said he civilly, "I beg your pardon for my coldness, which, indeed, had nothing of suspicion. But you must remember that we have never quite agreed. I hope that will mend. I remain greatly in your debt, and I trust you will be good enough to add to my obligations by keeping this man secure until my return. I will have the watch fetched at once."

"Nothing will give me greater satisfaction, sir," says the rogue cheerfully, and off goes Sir Philip with his black, portentous face, leaving us three there together again. As for me, I had made up my mind and was feeling my way to some action; but says York, looking on me pleasantly:

"Egad, you're in a ticklish case. Stap me, you've run your head into a noose! Now why the devil did you yield that way? I had looked for a good, round fight, as good, egad, as we had this evening. And I had begun to have my fears too—stap me I did!"

But I paid him no heed then, for I will confess that I was all eyes for Mrs. Lydia, whose face was very piteous. She was trembling violently and looked out of tragic lids, and, damme, it came upon me like a flash that she was no party to the lie herself, but had spoke in fear of that bully. Indeed, it may be that she took a distaste of him, as it were, from that scene which began to show from that minute. How else can be explained what ensued?

"You had better go, sir," said she at last in a whisper.

"Aye, that's true," says York, nodding. "I had not thought of that. You had better go. The watch will be fetched."

He looked so comfortable and so friendly, rather than what he was at heart, that my gorge rose of a sudden.

"I will be damned if I go!" says I. "If I must hang, I must hang."

Miss started. "Oh!" she cried, and "You must go, oh, you must go, sir! Fly, fly while there is time!"

Here were the two culprits in unison for my withdrawal, which would fetch them out of a scrape, yet how far the girl was involved in the business I had not yet determined. So I pushed her further, as, indeed, I had the right. I folded my arms.

"I am waiting my reward, Madam," I said,—“something in recognition of my service in behalf of yourself and Sir Philip."

But at this she fell into a greater exhibition of distress, imploring me to go, and flitting in agitation 'twixt me and the door, on which she kept anxious watch. Well, thought I, if here's not innocence, at least she is in a pickle enough, and I believe I would ha' gone had it not been for York, whose bearing annoyed me. Besides, I wanted to see how far Miss would venture, and if her resolution to veil the truth would stand out against the watch and a poor victim haled to prison. Not that I wanted the watch or the law about me nearer than was necessary for sundry reasons, but I can always trust to my own ingenuity and sword if it comes to the pinch. So I listened to her deafly and made no sign to go.

"Let him be, Lydia," says York presently, "he is an obstinate fellow, and, faith, deserves his fate. Let him hang. I'll warrant it must have come to that some day."

But this turns me on him, and I whipped out my blade again in a fury at his insolence; only Mrs. Lydia intervened, and, her face very pale, put a hand on my arm.

"Oh sir," says she, very low of voice, but clear and earnest for all that, "I beg you will not suffer further harm to come to-night. Indeed, but I am ashamed to look you in the face. I will not excuse myself, I will offer no apologies, yet maybe you would not think too hardly of me if you knew more. My guardian keeps me close. He stands in my way and will not allow me what is allowed all women. I am not a school-girl, sir. I am grown a height," and she raised herself to her full stature. "Surely I may have that liberty to command, go, and choose where I will, and whom. Sir, he has sought to make himself all the law to me," she cries with heaving bosom; "and as for his hurt, God knows I did not wish it, and was not privy to it," and she cast a glance, as I thought of scorn and reproach, at her lover. The eloquence of this attitude struck me to the reins, tender as I was to the wounds of women, though not to be frustrated or deceived by vain pretences.

"He is a hog," says I,—“a pig of a man—to interfere with you, Madam."

But here spoke York, when he had better have held his tongue, yet he was impossible:

The Attack on the Chaise

"Faith, child," he said lightly, "you have touched him there. But stop and go no further. Let it work."

"I will go on," she cried, stamping her foot and turning on him. "I will tell all to this gentleman, all that should be told; for it is his due and meed—a small recompense for the unworthy usage he has had. You have heard him, sir," she says, "and, indeed, your eyes have been witness to his deeds and what he is. My guardian came between us and denied us. And this was *his* plan—to snatch me away by violence while I stood passive, not refusing nor accepting." She wrung her hands in a transport of distress. "I—I was wild—I did madly; yet, sir, I would not have you judge me by that. See, it has all ended in trouble, nothing but trouble, and I have gained nothing for myself but shame."

She paused upon the edge of tears, as I could see pretty plain, and says I bluntly, "You were misled, and by them that should not," and I scowled at York where he stood. But York says nothing, merely lifting his shoulders, and being content, no doubt, to let Miss deal with the situation. She sank her face in her hands, which moved me strangely, for she had a helpless look.

"If I have misjudged, sir, and been mistook," she said, "can you blame me if I would bury that shame and not have it flaunted in my face?"

"Not I, Madam," said I; "I would I might help you, troth I do."

"You can," she cried, sparkling shyly and eagerly upon me.

"Why——" says I.

"If you will go, sir, there will be no trouble, no inquiry, and no law will be set in motion. 'Twill die a quiet death, and nothing will be digged up against me. I shall not have to tell the truth, as I shall have else," she cried, her lips parted in her fever, her eyes burning with a wild zeal.

York uttered a sound, but I was silent.

"Oh sir," she pleaded.

"Why," I said with a laugh, "it seems I must condone wounds, abduction, and all."

"'Tis on me the brunt will fall—the shame and scandal," she urged, and, looking in her pretty face, damme, I could resist no longer, for I'll swear she was genuine, and had been misled by that muckrake.

"I will go," says I, and then of a sudden remembered. "But how am I to escape?" says I.

"By the window," she said, pointing to it with animation.

"Why, to be sure," says I slowly, for I was taken with a notion; "but there is this gentleman, who is my guard."

"Oh!" says she archly, "I think your sword is better than his, and he will not stay you."

"True," says I. "But 'tis best to be prudent and to avoid Sir

Philip's suspicions. He must have some marks of a struggle. Either I must leave him with a wound or senseless, or gagged and bound, or maybe suspicion will come to rest on you, Madam."

Her brows were bent in a little frown. "That is true," she said, and turned to York, whose face for the first time, as I could see, wore a look of discomposure.

"He must be bound and gagged," says I, shaking my head.

"Ye-es," she says hesitatingly.

Whereupon I went forward to the fellow, who gnawed his lip and fidgeted. He looked at Mrs. Lydia as if about to speak, and then shot an angry glance at me, put paused.

"Oh, very well," says he at last with a grin, "but pray make haste, or you will be surprised in the middle of your job," and he had the air of yielding himself with good-humor. But I knew what must be his chagrin, though I admired him for his manner. He would ha' done pretty well on the road if he could have put by his scurvy way with women. Yet I was not for letting him off after what he had done, so, withdrawing the cords from the window-curtains, I tied him pretty quickly in a fast enough bundle. But when, his arms being lashed behind, I approached with a wedge of wood, York cried out in protest.

"Damme, I'll have none of that!" said he.

"He must be gagged," says I to the lady, appealing to her. She hesitated, and, looking on him, appeared to take pity, or maybe she was afraid of him.

"Perhaps it is not necessary," she said.

"Why, look ye, Madam," said I earnestly, "we must convince Sir Philip of our good faith, else he will smell out this trickery, and all our pains be thrown away."

She made no answer, and with the wedge I moved a step nearer to York, who grimaced and cried out with an oath,—

"May I be——"

But ere he could get it forth I had it between his teeth, and with my knee in his wind threw him in a heap upon the floor. Mrs. Lydia looked on with open eyes and with an air of uncertainty. What she would have said I know not, but at that moment there was a sound without the door and she broke out.

"Go! go!" she cried, running to me. "You can go now in safety."

"Yes, 'tis time I was gone if I am to keep the bargain," said I, looking with a grin on York, who was wriggling on the floor and striving to get his mouth free.

I gave Miss a congé and backed to the window. "If you will credit me, Madam," says I, "you will think twice ere you take up with York there."

"I know, I know," says she eagerly, for she was terrified of the sounds outside. "I will be wise, I promise you."

Her skirts swung against me, and that touch on my arm sent through me an amazing thrill, so that, beholding her so vastly handsome and passionate at my elbow, my blood fired at the sight.

"Madam," said I, very grave, "I had thought to do you some good, and that privilege would have been my reward. But I find myself only to have plunged you in embarrassments, for which may I be whipped! What get I for my pains, then? Why, nothing; not even the private consolation to have relieved you; and in this escape what touches me is not so much the ignominy, as the deprivation of these eyes of one they would have dwelled on always."

'Twas not ill phrased, as you will admit, and I got it off with unction, her face being so close to me, and devilish enticing. The sounds were not now audible, and I was at the window, so that I suppose she had forgot her tremors. A demure look crept in her face under my boldness, and says she softly,—

"What would you have me do?"

"Oh Madam," said I, turning on her, "look up, look up, I pray you, and I'll warrant you'll read me as clear as a book."

"I cannot guess, sir," says she, looking up with her innocent eyes all the same, while from the floor there was a choking sound, which, maybe, was the dust in York's nostrils. Miss looked round.

"We are keeping Mr. York in an uncomfortable position," says she sweetly. "'Tis not a pleasant posture to lie in."

"Faith," said I boldly, "I would lie so all night if I might get what I want now."

"What is it you want?" says she, opening her eyes in wonder.

"Why, what I will take, and suffer all risks," says I of a sudden. With which I put my arm about her swiftly and carried her face to mine. Mrs. Lydia called out "Oh!" and the gag was shaken with uncouth, unintelligible sounds. A noise streamed out of the hall.

"Go! go!" cries she, pink of face and sparkling, and seeing my time was come I turned and went, leaving the gag still spluttering in the corner.



FIDELITY

BY EDWARD WILBUR MASON

CAN I be friends with that so altered *you*,
And to your former friendly self keep true?

A MUSICAL GAME

By Philip H. Goepp

Author of "Symphonies and their Meaning," etc.



THE problem of titles in music has been discussed into a thoroughly muddled state. One trouble is, you are led astray into the most charming by-paths, where you survey, in lost wonder, the boundaries of the art. Mendelssohn's saying, that music is more definite than prose, comes to disturb from the root all the premises of what we are to define in our language of tones or of words.

Titles in music made a great to-do—almost a revolution—when they first appeared, early in the last century. Music is like the good old party of the people: though founded on a sound base, it is most prone to delusions and heresies. There is an amusing list of these musical fads and furores of a dim past. There was no reason to stop anywhere in the new deluge of "composition;" one of the last enterprises was the setting of all the "Acts of the Apostles."

Another curious point of musical history was the rage of the Faux Bourdon, the false bass. The usual chord, it was found, would not move in parallel lines of all the voices. At any rate, a century or so of that sort of "harmony" exhausted the delights that Hucbald the monk tells us he found in this hideous practice. But, set the chord in its first inversion, and all the friction of sound is gone from the parallel motion; the voices move sweetly in an eternal rut, where there is no more creative thought than in the cooing of a babe. To this day the figure is used within limits; Beethoven has it as a subject in a sonata. But in the dear old age of first discoveries of elemental things it was the new-found, natural law of voice-progression. Start your chord of the sixth and third, and keep moving it ad libitum anywhere you please; the harmony was ever perfect. Of course, you had no true bass; but that didn't matter as long as you did not stop. Then, it gave too the simplest recipe for harmonizing tunes. The Church finally forbade the practice in pure self-defence against the general demoralization. It all shows the child-like proneness to error in art, and the quaint desire for regular, thought-saving routine, just as alchemy would spare the toil of mining gold.

The rage for titles in music led to a quest for a kind of hidden,

graphic translation of events into the tonal language. Programme music is the name for the disease. It is one of the subtlest dangers that has beset the art. Even Bach fell a victim when he wrote a crowing cock in his setting of the "Passion." Beethoven has the calls of the quail, the cuckoo, and the nightingale, and literal rain and thunder, in the picture of his "Pastoral Symphony."

But there is a real use of titles. Schumann came nearest the true sense when he confessed that he wrote the name *after* the music. Now hear the good Philistine laugh! "Like the boy, forsooth, who discovers, when the picture is done, whether he has drawn a cow or a pig." Well, it isn't like that at all. The fact is, music is neither a graphic art nor a guessing-match; whether it is too high or too low need not be broached. The first point is that the subject of music is never important. So a great painting must always be independent of its title. The beauty is all, unless you want to go deeper for the feeling that the poet utters, all unwitting, because it possesses him altogether.

The capacity of music for emotional burden can be defined or refined in limited association. To be sure, there is no external cocksure guaranty of absolute relevance,—that lies in the quality of sincerity that is always clear enough. Within very large spheres there is a plenty of inspiration. So Raff sat him down to symphonies on "The Forest" or "Winter;" and there is no break in the perennial charm of situation, though there is, somehow, with the gain of definite sense a certain loss of breadth and power.

But Schumann's way was the better. Free from the fetters of predetermined subject, he could let the feeling prompt and the figures grow without an anxious eye to the title. The consciousness of a mastering idea will often break on the tonal poet just after the white heat of absorbed design. In a certain way it is quite right and fair for the composer to paint his musical picture and then see what it is. Why not? If it is beautiful, and therefore true, it is surely worth doing, and sounds as sweet by one name as another.

And there we return to the truth that is ever slipping out of ken: the name is not important; it really doesn't count. It is not like a statute, or a book on mathematics, that must answer its title. Why, even a poem or a romance may be misnamed without a real loss.

The true duty of the musical title is to give the sense of controlling mood or idea that the poet himself has discovered. If the "meaning" is not essential, neither, on the other hand, must the listener be denied any clew that the poet may give. All the time spent in puzzling is wasted, is a loss of musical enjoyment.

But we have put our claim for the graphic power of music at the very lowest, as a safe discouragement of definite translation. In truth, it may be, often, more than this touch of postscript. The power of

mimicry may find a subtle medium in tones. This was a trait of Schumann, even in boyhood. The philosophic formula for the true degree of tonal definition is not within reach. There are, of course, mere physical qualities—of speed or loudness—that may have their rough association. The more external the correspondence, the less interesting is the music. It is in the invisible sign-manual that lies the greatest charm, and, at the same time, a surety of tense, emotional conception. Thus in Schumann's "Children's Scenes," "Blind Man's Buff" is most easily caught in the quick, darting figure; but it is of all the least satisfying. "Lonely Flowers" in the "Forest Scenes" has an exquisite symbolism in the sweetly twining course of the melodies. The "Inn" has nothing of outer description; but the jolly rollicking, the freedom from pensive hue, leave the listener as much delighted with the sure sense of his discovery as the actual wanderer in the woods.

It is, of course, in the series of such scenes or events that each is reinforced by contrast with the other. Nothing could be more opposite than the "Haunted Spot" and the "Inn," and it is the recoil from one that makes the other clear.

All this has suggested a game which is heartily commended and has been well tested. A good pianist, who knows more than his mere notes, plays to a group of friends the scenes that are to be guessed. But the first point is a warning. Never try to find the sense of music without some clew. It would be utterly vain to make a blind guess at the "meaning" that the composer has put in a title, for the title is there for the very purpose of helping and enlightening.

The main direction, then, is that the player read to his listeners some half-dozen titles, naming, or not, the composer, as he elects. Each listener thereupon makes a list for himself in the order given. The player then plays the compositions in a different order, which he takes care not to make known, and the listeners write opposite their titles the number of each composition as (they think) it was played. When the playing is finished the guesses are read out in turn.

The game can be made as difficult as one pleases by taking a longer list.

The danger is the diversion from a pure musical enjoyment to an anxious hunt for hidden symbols. All this is much diminished by reading the answers beforehand, leaving the order alone uncertain. What might have been a guessing-match is thus a mere quest of correspondences.

Among the compositions especially fitted for the game are Schumann's "Children's Scenes," "Forest Scenes," and "Carnaval." There is a host of single, entitled pieces by Schumann and others. The true value of the game would lie in a quickened zest for much of the best poetry in the art.

LYRICS OF LOVE AND SORROW

BY PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

I.

THE light was on the golden sands,
A glimmer on the sea;
My soul spoke clearly to thy soul,
Thy spirit answered me.

Since then the light that gilds the sands
And glimmers on the sea,
But vainly struggles to reflect
The radiant soul of thee.

II.

The sea speaks to me of you
All the day long;
Still as I sit by its side
You are its song.

The sea sings to me of you
Loud on the reef;
Always it moans as it sings,
Voicing my grief.

III.

My dear love died last night,
Shall I clothe her in white?
My passionate love is dead,
Shall I robe her in red?
But nay, she was all untrue,
She shall not go dressed in blue;
Still, my desolate love was brave,
Unrobed, let her go to her grave.

IV.

There are brilliant heights of sorrow
That only the few may know,
And the lesser woes of the world, like waves,
Break noiselessly far below.
I hold for my own possessing
A mount that is lone and still,
The great high place of a hopeless grief,
And I call it my "Heart-break Hill."
And once on a winter's midnight
I found its highest crown,
And there in the gloom, my soul and I,
Weeping, we sat us down.

But now when I seek that summit
We are two ghosts that go,
Only two shades of a thing that died,
Once in the long ago.
So I sit me down in the silence,
And say to my soul, "Be still,"
So the world may not know we died that night,
From weeping on "Heart-break Hill."

CINDERELLA'S SISTERS

By E. Ayrton



OLD Mrs. Marsden and the three Misses Marsden were sitting in the little Bayswater drawing-room, awaiting Joan Elliot's arrival.

"I expect she'll be awfully dowdy, after being buried in the country all her life," giggled Miss Carrie.

"Yes, she'll find us rather gay, won't she?" tittered Miss Florence, who was a fainter copy of her elder sister.

Miss Mary was silent. Presently she asked, "Did the man see to the springs of the spare-room mattress, mamma?"

"Oh, you dreadfully sensible thing!" Miss Carrie gave a little shriek. "Isn't she quite too dreadfully sensible? You can sit and talk about mattresses when a new cousin, whom we've none of us ever seen, is coming to stay for a month! Why, Florrie and I are so excited we don't know what to do. You're really getting into a regular old maid."

What Miss Carrie said was quite true—Mary was becoming an old maid. The family Bible recorded her age, which was thirty-nine, and a discreet blank after her name indicated her single condition. Had you been curious enough to look farther, you might have seen that Miss Carrie and Miss Florrie possessed prior claims to the title.

At this moment a cab drew up. "Come along, girls," cried Miss Carrie, running out into the hall. She opened the front door and saw a tall young figure standing outside. "Oh my dear girl," she exclaimed, "you must be half frozen, you poor, dear thing!" Then she embraced Joan impulsively, and, taking hold of her arm, pulled her forward.

Joan Elliot looked a trifle dazed as she came into the brightly lit drawing-room. It may have been the sudden warmth and light, or perhaps she had been rather overwhelmed by the effusiveness of her cousin's welcome. Her glance was almost obviously surprised as it rested on Carrie and Florrie. She also knew the information contained in the family Bible. "It must be a mistake, they're quite girls," she thought, and then she saw that their pale eyes had a curiously tired look. Their necks and hands too were many years older than their trim little figures and undeveloped conversation. "They're not made up young or anything, but I don't like anachronisms," Joan felt vaguely.

"I'm so glad you've come," Miss Carrie was babbling, "and that the horrid hatchet is buried at last. That's my little joke, you know, and, of course, it wasn't your fault or ours that it hasn't been done before. I always felt that you and your dad would want to make up this horrid quarrel, but it was no good asking you to stay as long as that dreadful old man was alive, though I suppose I oughtn't to speak so of mamma's own brother; still, I hadn't seen him since I was quite a child."

Joan had flushed uncomfortably and seemed to be going to speak, when Miss Mary suggested softly: "Perhaps Joan was fond of him. He was her grandfather, Carrie."

"Oh dear, how dreadful of me!" exclaimed Miss Carrie. "I'm always saying dreadful things like that. I am such a terrible chatter-box! Just like last night after the mission meeting. Mr. Brown,—he's our curate, and such a sweet man, my dear—now, Florrie, don't pinch me,—well, he asked if he should get us a cab, for he's very attentive—oh dear! that's another thing I shouldn't have said. So I thanked him, and without thinking I told him that mamma never allows us to go out in the evening alone. Of course, I meant that the maid hadn't fetched us yet; but he must have thought all sorts of dreadful things, perhaps that I was asking him to come with us or something."

"But why shouldn't he have seen you home, Cousin Carrie?" asked Joan in puzzled tones.

"Oh my dear girl! one can see you haven't lived in London long. Why, it would have been dreadfully wanting in *comme il faut*. I only hope, as it is, he doesn't think me a sad, forward thing. But don't call me 'cousin,' dear, it sounds so stiff and dreadful, when we're all girls together here."

Joan almost laughed, but she caught herself up in time. "Don't you find it rather inconvenient, always being—fetched?" She hesitated over the incongruously childish word.

"Of course it's inconvenient, but what can we girls do?"

"Oh, I go out alone at any time," Joan began incautiously.

The remark fell like a thunderbolt. "No lady ventures out in the evening unattended," announced old Mrs. Marsden. The rarity of her remarks was only equalled by their unpleasantness.

Carrie had given a little scream, which was echoed by Florence. "Oh, I should be frightened to death," she cried; "but then you are so big and strong, almost like a man. Poor little Florrie and me would be afraid that some great big ogre would eat us up."

"Yes, I am strong," assented Joan cheerfully. "Feel my biceps," she said, turning to the old lady. "Billy says it's the best biceps he's ever known in a girl."

"Who is Billy, if it isn't indiscreet?" giggled Miss Carrie.

"Oh, he's just one of the boys."

The old lady's awful tones again broke into the conversation. "I was not aware you had any brothers," she said.

Carrie and Florence tittered and Miss Mary moved uneasily, but Joan went on with undiminished cheerfulness:

"No more I have. They're just 'pals,' you know—men who live near my home; I've known most of them since I was quite small. A lot have gone away now, though; it's positively heart-breaking. Billy's at the Front. That's not his real name, of course; it's William Ernest Hales, but you simply can't call him that—no one could. I'll show you his photo if you like."

"I think it's time to get ready for dinner," interposed Miss Mary timidly.

If Joan went upstairs under the ban of Mrs. Marsden's disapproval, it darkened heavily on her reappearance in full evening dress. Poor Joan was hardly to blame, for in her own home and at the other houses where she visited they dressed for dinner as a matter of course. On her rare visits to London she had stayed at the Grand Central, and had had, as she expressed it, "perfectly gorgeous times," which had certainly demanded décolleté toilettes. So she donned a favorite Empire gown with perfect serenity, and was absolutely taken aback to find that, although her cousins had changed, it was only to high, much-trimmed pink silk blouses, while Mary wore a black silk dress with a piece of lace ungracefully pinned about the shoulders.

"I wish she'd let me fix that fichu; she'd look quite pretty," thought Joan, but aloud she only said, "Oh dear, I'm afraid I'm too much dressed."

"Too little!" snorted old Mrs. Marsden.

"I suppose she hasn't the least idea of the proper thing to wear," whispered Carrie to Florence. "And what a garb! She must have made it at home. We really couldn't take her to the Annual Guild Meeting like that."

"May I look at your pretty necklace, my dear?" asked Cousin Mary.

Here the dinner-bell rang, and they made their way down the steep stairs into a basement room. The conversation was chiefly kept up by Carrie and Florence, who were discussing the doings of their neighbor's housemaid with great animation. "I do love to sit at the window and see all that's going on," one of them told Joan.

It was not until the end of the meal that the old lady snapped out a remark. "Mr. Beezley told me that he intends to pay us a visit this evening," she said.

Joan was surprised at the effect. She was so used to men dropping

in at home for a game of billiards, or merely to chat, that she did not know a masculine visitor might form a Great Event.

"Oh mamma!" shrilled Miss Carrie, "why didn't you tell us before; I must run and change my blouse."

"Goodness gracious!" twittered Miss Florence with an obvious glance at the looking-glass as she patted her hair distractedly, and then fled, probably to curl it.

Even Cousin Mary looked disturbed. "I'd better see about the coffee," she said to Joan. "Mamma likes a little nap downstairs, but you go into the drawing-room, my dear."

Joan obediently went upstairs; she was gurgling with suppressed amusement; but then her face saddened. "Oh, it's pitiful! pitiful!" she was thinking; "they are starved, not for food, of course, but for a little admiration, a little love. And I—I have so much."

After all this excitement, Joan looked up curiously when Mr. Beezley was announced. "Oh, he's quite old," she thought, with some disappointment.

As Mr. Beezley's shyness wore off, Joan grew interested. He was quite a different kind of a man from any she had known, although her "boys," as she called them, were nice young fellows, gentlemanly and athletic, if, perhaps, not very clever. Mr. Beezley was a botanist, it appeared, and he talked of his work in a way that made Joan wonder why she had always considered the subject as hopelessly dull. He was just telling her of some curious plant mimicry when Carrie came running in.

"Oh, dear, Mr. Beezley, you'll think it dreadfully rude of us all being out of the room like this. I hope it hasn't seemed a very long time. Mamma was so naughty, she never told us you were coming."

"Your cousin and I have been entertaining each other," said Mr. Beezley.

"Oh, yes, of course; I heard you talking as I came in, and using such dreadfully long, difficult words that you quite frightened poor little me. Were you telling her about your lecture next week? I suppose there won't be any ladies present?" she asked a trifle obviously.

"Yes," he replied. "Would you care to come?"

"Oh Mr. Beezley,"—Carrie gave a giggle,—"you must talk to mamma about it. I couldn't go alone, though, could I?"

"I meant that I could take a party," Beezley said rather shortly, looking round.

"Oh, that would be delightful, if dear Joan would accompany us," began Miss Carrie, and then the others appeared and conversation became general.

"It's delicious," Joan said to herself, "quite too delicious; I'm

to be the chaperone. I don't believe it's ever dawned on her that I'm good-looking!"

The evening seemed very long after that. Miss Carrie played and sang, as might have been expected. "I suppose a great, strong Thing like you despises my poor little accomplishments," she said suddenly to Joan with a spice of malice; "you only care for playing cricket and football and that sort of thing, don't you, dear?"

Joan laughed unpleasantly. She was about to retort, but she saw Miss Mary looking distressed. "The only accomplishment I ever prided myself on was turning cartwheels," she remarked instead, "and that isn't much use socially after nursery days."

"Oh you dreadful, dreadful girl!" Miss Carrie turned away, overcome with blushes.

"I think it was rather nice of me not to tell them that I really can sing," Joan was saying to herself—rather hotly, for she was not used to feline amenities. "But I like Cousin Mary; I won't make her uncomfortable; besides, Cousin Carrie is old enough to be treated with forbearance," and Joan felt a little inward ripple of amusement.

"It may have been the prospect of more music that caused Mr. Beezley to take a sudden departure. Miss Carrie immediately abandoned the music-stool. "Oh, I'm so tired," she yawned; "let's come along to bed."

Joan was tired too, and welcomed the suggestion. She soon found, however, the going to bed was nominal. "Florrie and I will brush our hair in your room, dear," said Miss Carrie; "then we can have a good talk. I'm longing to hear all about you. I'm sure you're a dreadfully naughty girl too," and she giggled slyly.

To Joan's relief, however, she found that their longing to hear about her showed itself by talking continuously about themselves. It seemed, indeed, that they would go on indefinitely, and Joan's brain began to reel as she listened to detailed accounts of a long succession of curates. At last an imperious knocking was heard on the wall.

"Oh, that's mamma," whispered Miss Carrie; "we must run, or we'll get into a dreadful scrape. There, I said you'd much sooner share our room, then we could have gone on all night, but Mary thought not, as you were almost a stranger and that. But I'd be dreadfully nervous at sleeping alone—oh, quite terrified. Don't you really mind?"

"I hate sharing a room," said Joan. She was on the edge of losing her temper.

"Oh, oh, oh," she groaned, as at last she was left alone, "a whole month of this, twenty-eight days, billions of hours! Why did I say I'd stop so long!"

She pulled back the many curtains and flung open the window. The night seemed restfully large and cold and far-away after all this tittle-

tattle of flirtations and personalities. "Why haven't they ever learned to grow old?" she reflected wonderingly. "People ought to be taught it at school. Perhaps, though, they'd choose not to have a single wrinkle, inside or out, and call it 'wearing well.' Oh, it isn't, though! It's putting wigs and rouge on your mind; it's being stunted, deformed, —pitiable," and Joan flung out her firm white arms with a breezy gesture of youth.

Suddenly she let her hands fall. "To think that in twenty years I might be like that," she said slowly; "I've no work either, nothing to give me mental wrinkles. Oh, it's enough to make one get married. It really is—only I'm so dreadfully fond of *all* the dear boys." Her lips curved deliciously.

II.

THE weeks passed more bearably than Joan had anticipated. Mr. Beezley's frequent visits were certainly an alleviation, although Carrie and Florrie usually monopolized his attention, despite his obvious struggles to join the rest of the party at the other side of the room. Occasionally he did manage it, and he and Joan had some delightful conversations. He discovered, to her surprise, quite an unexplored continent in her brain. Even when Miss Carrie's one-sided flirtation proved too detaining, Joan enjoyed the opportunity it gave her of talking to Miss Mary. She had grown fond of this middle-aged cousin, who was not very original, perhaps, but under whose timidity lay a sweet and kindly graciousness, which only needed a little warmth and sunshine to be revealed. She was more than passively unperfected, she was actively unhappy, Joan discovered, when her stay was nearing its end.

It had been such a pleasant evening too. Carrie and Florence were at their weekly guild meeting and Mr. Beezley had called. It was quite a remarkable coincidence how often his visits chanced to fall on this night. As he was taking off his coat in the hall the postman's knock had sounded, so he brought in the letter that had come—a letter with the stirring post-mark of "Active Service." Joan danced for joy when she saw it, for she had been very anxious about her Billy. She insisted on reading it aloud, and Mary and Mr. Beezley listened with interest to the accounts of marches and privations, graphic by their very ill-telling. Through it all ran a spirit of joyous adventure and fresh young camaraderie, that was clean and bracing as the wind over the moor.

"Oh, I wish I were there with him," cried Joan, and, seizing the never-used brass poker, she made pretence to shoulder arms, then, dashing to the piano, she broke out into "The Bonnets of Bonnie Dundee." Her listeners sat there dumb. They had not guessed the presence of this thrilling contralto voice. Presently Mr. Beezley got up and stood

beside her, looking down at the vivid face and strong, white throat. She sang song after song; it was an orgy of youth and life and color. Only Cousin Mary sat undistinguishable in the dusky background, seeming ever to grow paler and less significant.

It may have been through very happiness that Joan could not sleep that night, a most unusual circumstance. At last she thought that she would fetch a book, so she crept downstairs, very softly, for fear old Mrs. Marsden might wake and confront her, a terrifying object in an antique-patterned dressing-gown and large, frilled nightcap.

Joan opened the drawing-room door almost noiselessly, and then stopped short in amazement. Stretched on the sofa, her face hidden among the disordered antimacassars, lay a black-gowned figure. Could this be the calm, ladylike Miss Mary, this despairing woman who had flung herself down in a very abandonment of desolation? Joan was just going to hurry forward, thinking that her cousin must be ill, when the sound of a sob caught at her heart. She had often seen people in distress; when Billy went away she had cried a good deal herself, but it had been another sort of weeping. She turned and tiptoed upstairs. It seemed dishonorable to have suddenly divined the reason of this sorrow. "And she hasn't even got a room of her own to cry in, poor, poor Cousin Mary," said Joan.

And yet the next day at breakfast it was Joan who looked tired and uncomfortable. Cousin Mary was sitting placidly behind the large silver teapot, filling the cups with her usual careful sedateness. Joan began to wonder if she had dreamed last night's scene, when she saw her cousin's hand tremble slightly.

"I'd like to hear what time you came up to bed last night," old Mrs. Marsden was grumbling, "disturbing me just as I was dropping off. And goodness knows what hours you'd keep if you were left to yourself and didn't sleep in my room."

"I'm so sorry, mamma. I'm afraid I did allow myself to get too interested in the new Mudie books," said Miss Mary. She even smiled.

"If Billy gets six V. C.'s, he can't beat that," thought Joan. Then she choked over her tea prosaically.

Joan was glad that in two days her visit would be over. She was so unused to concealment that she found it hard not to betray her pity. This was the real reason that she declined going for a walk with Miss Mary that afternoon while Mrs. Marsden and the girls were out calling.

So Joan was alone when Mr. Beezley was announced. "I'm sorry the others are all out," she began a trifle nervously.

Mr. Beezley seemed nervous too. He did not sit down. "I'm glad," he said at last abruptly. "I've been wanting to see you alone, Miss Elliot. There's something I want to ask you. We've been good friends——" then he hesitated.

"It's coming," said Joan to herself, feeling rather sea-sick. She generally did on such occasions. She was very unromantic! Perhaps she felt worse than usual, for this was the first time that she had been uncertain of her own feelings.

"I think you must have seen that I—that there is someone in this house for whom I entertain a very warm regard," Mr. Beezley went on with an old-fashioned constraint.

"I like that much better than the modern way," suddenly flashed through Joan's mind with a curious impersonality, "it's more dignified. I wish he wore powdered hair and knee-breeches."

"Perhaps I ought not to address you on the subject, Miss Elliot, but you must see that my position is rather peculiar——"

"He thinks he ought to ask father's leave to pay his court; how deliciously mediæval," laughed Joan to herself. "He can't have proposed to many girls," she thought with a sudden tenderness.

"I do not want to speak more definitely to the lady," Beezley was saying, "for fear of wounding her feelings. I mean it might then spoil our friendship, if she could not reciprocate my attachment. So I thought that you, in your kindness, would give me some clew, some hint. No one else could do it."

"I think you must speak a little more definitely," said Joan softly. The corners of her mouth were trembling. She looked beautiful.

"Surely, surely I needn't say it," he was almost whispering; his face was very good to look at, glorified as it was by his emotion,—
"surely I needn't tell you that I love—Miss Mary."

"What!" cried Joan. She could not help it. She would have summoned up her pride, but the shock had been too sudden. Fortunately Mr. Beezley misunderstood her.

"You surely could not imagine that I had any feeling towards Miss Carrie," he said, blushing boyishly.

"Oh, no, no!" Joan had mastered herself now. "I just thought you were such an old friend—like a brother—to them all, you know. I—I think you'd better ask Cousin Mary herself. I don't think she'll be wounded—though, of course, I don't know what she'll answer," she added hurriedly with a desperate womanly loyalty; for, indeed, she knew very well.

Mr. Beezley had taken a sudden step towards the door. "Perhaps I'll meet her if I go out," he said. Then he turned back. "How discourteous and ungrateful I am," and he held out his hand.

"Good-by. I love Cousin Mary too," she said.

He did meet Cousin Mary, and he must have acted on Joan's advice, for they were a very long time coming home, and when they arrived they looked most ridiculously happy. Joan hardly recognized her

cousin; for the first time she seemed to have blossomed out into full womanhood. She had at last felt the sunlight.

"I'm so happy about it," Joan whispered to her. She kept repeating the words to herself all the evening, and when she went upstairs that night she said them once again. Then, by way of showing her happiness, she began to cry.

"It's no good pretending," she whispered to herself, "it's no good pretending any more. I do care for him—oh, I do! At least what I like most is his preferring Cousin Mary. At last I've found one man who doesn't only think of looks. But then if it had been me he'd wanted I shouldn't have found him;" and she laughed dolefully. "Besides," she went on with a resolute cheerfulness, "when Billy comes home, as a defender of the empire, the amount of snubbing he'll need will be terrific. It will take up all my time and energy. He does look nice in khaki though. Dear old Bill!"



IN NOVEMBER

BY INGRAM CROCKETT

THE wild duck's wavering wedge
Upon the afterglow—
A whisper in the sedge,
The new moon hanging low.

A sparrow's flute-like call,
A cobweb's twinkling gleam,
A peace that hallows all—
The beckoning of a dream.

A thought of long-lost days,
A memory and a tear,
A tenderness of haze
Upon the woodlands sere.

And on the Spirit's lips
The seal of silence set—
The shadow of eclipse,
The muteness of regret.

LADY DELIA

By Thomas Cobb

Author of "The Dissemblers," etc.



LADY DELIA felt that she must tell somebody of her astounding experience, and when Janet Waymark called in Grosvenor Square at five o'clock on the last Tuesday in November the desired opportunity seemed to be provided.

The recollection caused her face to flush again with indignation, and Janet could not help admitting the great attractiveness of the girl, whom a year ago she had regarded as a child.

"You can't imagine anything half so dreadful," said Lady Delia, holding back her head disdainfully.

"Dreadful things don't happen to children of your age," answered Janet with the calm superiority of twenty-five. She was a small woman, rather fond of admitting that her only attraction was an income of twenty thousand pounds a year.

"But it *has* happened," Lady Delia insisted, "though it's difficult to believe that any man could do such a thing!"

"Who is he and what has he done?" asked Janet.

"I told you," Lady Delia explained, "that Will and I were getting up some private theatricals for our house-party."

Affairs connected with the ministry, of which he was a distinguished member, had brought the Earl of Wharfstead to London at a time when he would have preferred to be amongst his pheasants, but he fully intended to return to his country-place for Christmas.

"We are doing a comedietta," Lady Delia continued, "and in an evil hour I consented to take a part in a farce as well—a very small part, a parlor-maid, who hasn't a dozen words to say."

"Well?" suggested Janet languidly.

"We had a rehearsal here yesterday afternoon," said Lady Delia, "and I put on a black frock and the most elaborate cap and apron——"

"No doubt, you looked ravishing!" cried Janet, a little enviously.

"Oh, well," Lady Delia admitted, "if the wretched things hadn't suited me, I suppose it wouldn't have happened. After the rehearsal they all went away but Barbara, and I insisted on going downstairs to let her out."

"You were determined to live up to your part!"

"There was no one in the hall," said Lady Delia, "so I opened the street-door. Barbara begged me not to show myself, but it was almost

dark, and I could only be taken for one of our own servants, you know. Anyhow," Lady Delia continued, "I was standing in the middle of the door-way when a hansom stopped and a man——"

"Young?" asked Janet.

"About twenty-five, I suppose."

"And lovely?"

"He was rather good-looking——"

"But, of course," Janet suggested, "if it was almost dark, you couldn't see very much of him."

"Anyhow," said Lady Delia, "he took me for the parlor-maid. He came into the hall and—and what could I do?" she demanded, throwing out her hands.

"If I had been in your place," cried Janet, "I should have run away. But then, if I had been there, it wouldn't have been necessary."

"You see," Lady Delia explained, "he pressed on, and so I was obliged to draw back. Then he stared at me and asked whether Will was at home."

"And after that," said Janet, "I suppose he went away——"

"No, he didn't," was the reply. "He wanted to know whether Will was in London, and he said he should call again the day after to-morrow—that's to-morrow, you know. And then——"

"Well?" urged Janet.

"Oh, I wish I hadn't," said Lady Delia, "but I—I felt rather curious to know who he was, so I asked his name."

"Still keeping to your role of parlor-maid?"

"Why, of course."

"I don't see that it was quite a matter of course," said Janet.

"Anyhow," Lady Delia continued, "I asked his name, and he took out a card-case. He seemed to be rather nervous."

"Poor, dear man!"

"He fumbled with the card, you know, and once or twice he looked at me, and I—I——"

"What did you do?"

"I happened to be looking at him."

"Strange," said Janet reflectively.

"Then he gave me the card and our hands touched," Lady Delia continued, and Janet noticed that she was breathing very quickly.

"An accident, no doubt," she suggested.

"The next moment," cried Lady Delia indignantly, "he had the audacity to put his arm around my waist and—and he kissed my mouth."

"Oh!" said Janet, and Lady Delia covered her face with her hands. "Is that the end of the story?" Miss Waymark asked presently.

"Nearly."

"You may as well tell me the rest, even if it does seem like an anti-climax."

"It's only that he—he swore," faltered Lady Delia.

"He swore at you?"

"At himself, I suppose," was the answer. "I was intensely stupid. I couldn't help crying, and perhaps he felt a little ashamed."

"Don't you think he ought to?" cried Janet.

"Oh, it was horrible—abominable! But what am I to do?"

"To do?"

"Janet," said Lady Delia, "did you ever hate anybody?—not dislike, but really hate, you know?"

Janet shook her head.

"Too dangerous," she returned. "They say that if you press an intensely cold iron to your flesh, you can't tell whether it's hot or frozen. Extremes meet, you understand. May I hear his name?" asked Janet.

"Sir Francis Sargent," said Lady Delia.

She was too deeply absorbed by her own indignation to notice Janet's sudden expression of astonishment.

"I would do anything sooner that meet him again!" she exclaimed.

"That would prove a little uncomfortable for Sir Francis also," suggested Janet quietly.

"I want him to feel uncomfortable," said Lady Delia. "Will was talking about him last night," she continued. "He said he should invite him to Wharfstead for Christmas; besides, he will come to-morrow."

"If he felt ashamed of himself," answered Janet, "he will probably stay away."

Lady Delia did not answer for a moment.

"I am positive he will come," she said, with her face aflame.

"Well," suggested Janet, rising from her chair, "suppose you spend to-morrow afternoon with me. Will you?"

"Then," said Lady Delia, "I shall not see him."

"Do you want to see him?" demanded Janet sharply.

"Of course not. How can you suggest such a thing?" Lady Delia retorted.

"Then I shall expect you to-morrow afternoon."

Lady Delia accordingly set forth at about four o'clock to Park Lane. Janet, being an only child and having lost her mother several years before, was entirely her own mistress. Lady Delia fancied that she seemed nervous and excited that afternoon as they sat discussing their friends for ten minutes without interruption; but then the drawing-room door opened and to Lady Delia's consternation the butler announced,—

"Sir Francis Sargent."

He entered with the easy, self-possessed air of the modern young man, advancing with his hand outstretched to Janet.

"So glad you were able to come!" she exclaimed. "I wanted you so much to know my friend, Lady Delia. Lady Delia Herrick, Sir Francis Sargent."

All his self-possession left him, and for once in his life Sargent was entirely embarrassed. For a few moments he stood staring at Lady Delia and wishing that the floor might open to engulf him. His left hand trembled as he held his hat and cane, and with his right fingers he nervously twisted his dark mustache.

"Have you met Lady Delia before?" asked Janet with well-counterfeited astonishment.

"I—I think I have had—had that pleasure," he stammered, and nothing could have annoyed Lady Delia more than this manner of describing their previous encounter.

"Where was that?" asked Janet, whilst Lady Delia now recovered herself sufficiently to dart a reproachful look at her.

"Perhaps Lady Delia scarcely recollects," muttered Sargent, not knowing, indeed, what to say.

"I recollect perfectly," said Lady Delia in her most dignified manner.

"Quite lately, then?" Janet persisted.

"Our last—our last meeting," Sargent answered, aware that he was hopelessly floundering, "may not be an agreeable reminiscence to Lady Delia."

"You can't have the assurance to say you share her feeling!" cried Janet.

Lady Delia sat stiffly erect, with a flushed face and shining eyes, and even Janet recognized that she had never looked more bewitching.

She bit her lower lip as he glanced at her.

"No," he answered quietly, "I can't say that."

An embarrassing silence followed, Sargent devoutly wishing he could decently go away.

"A man is like the moon," said Janet abruptly.

"When it's under a cloud!" exclaimed Sir Francis.

"We see him night after night," Janet continued, "yet it seems that there's one side that's always hidden from us."

"No doubt some of us have our dark sides," he admitted.

"Very dark," said Lady Delia significantly, and at that he arose and shook hands with Janet. With a bow for Lady Delia, and an expression which was intended to be contrite, he left the room, and before Lady Delia could turn upon Janet she began to defend herself.

"I know you must think I have treated you abominably," she cried.

"I think you have," was the answer.

"It was no use," Janet admitted; "I couldn't resist the temptation——"

"You didn't even tell me you knew him!" said Lady Delia indignantly.

"That would have hindered his punishment!" exclaimed Janet.

"You will admit he deserved it."

"I don't think I deserved it, Janet! Besides——"

"Well?"

"Only that I am quite capable of managing my own affairs. It was scarcely your business!"

"Oh, but, indeed, it was. I admit you are a victim. I met Sir Francis in Switzerland during the autumn. He was introduced to my father. He became—well, attentive to me. Of course," said Janet with a sigh, "I was an idiot. I tried to persuade myself that at last I had met a man who didn't think only of my money."

"I wish I hadn't told you a word about it," said Lady Delia, after a short pause.

"My dear, I shall always feel grateful to you!"

"Still," was the answer, "you choose an odd way to show gratitude."

"I am afraid I didn't think much about you," Janet admitted. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "to remember that he pretended to care, and yet half an hour after leaving me, that he could kiss a housemaid! It is atrocious!"

"But," said Lady Delia, "he didn't."

"Didn't what?"

"He didn't—he didn't kiss a housemaid."

"Anyhow, that was what he thought he was doing," cried Janet.

"Oh, of course, it was hateful of him," said Lady Delia, as she arose from her chair.

A few days passed without any further sign of Sir Francis Sargent, although Lady Delia gathered that Will had met him at the club. There were a good many of her "set" in London just now, and one evening during the first week of December Lady Delia went to a small and early dance at Mrs. Prince's, and there, with curious sensations, she saw Sargent.

He had obviously recovered from the embarrassment which he had shown at Janet's, and, approaching with complete audacity, he bowed to Lady Delia.

"I have had the honor of meeting you before," he began, and his impudence almost bewildered her. "May I ask you for a dance?" he added.

"Certainly not," was all she could say, although the words seemed entirely inadequate.

"Well," he continued, "if you will not dance with me, I hope, at least, you will give me a chance to explain——"

"There is one thing I hope devoutly," said Lady Delia.

"What is that?" he asked, leaning towards her.

"That you will never let me see you again!"

The next moment she scarcely knew whether to feel angry or amused, but Lady Delia determined to feel angry.

"We cannot talk here," said Sargent.

"I have not the slightest wish to talk to you anywhere," she rejoined.

"I only wish you to listen, you know," he continued with a smile, and, finding that she did not answer, he sat down by her side. "I have succeeded in solving the mystery," he remarked the next moment. "I braved Miss Waymark again——"

"It must have required courage," said Lady Delia, but then she grew angry with herself.

"Yes, it did," he admitted. "But I am not accustomed to sleepless nights. I was bound to discover why you were masquerading——"

"Oh, please—please——"

"I know," he went on, "that Miss Waymark has been giving me a bad character."

"Your deeds spoke for you," said Lady Delia, carried away by an impulse of the moment.

"You ignore my immense temptation," he answered.

"I think you acted disgracefully!"

"Peccavi!" cried Sir Francis.

"For a—a gentleman to come to his friend's house and insult a—a servant!"

"Oh, well, I didn't, you know, Lady Delia."

"You thought I—I was a servant!" she insisted.

"Upon my word, I thought you were a goddess," he said, bending eagerly towards her.

"You—you showed very little veneration," was the answer.

"I want you to bury the hatchet," he urged, "and accept me as your brother's friend."

"It seems to me," said Lady Delia, "that you must be a very undesirable friend for him."

Sargent glanced at her askant as he stroked his mustache. He came to the conclusion that he knew more about Lord William Herrick than his sister.

"Still," he persisted, "can you feel justified in repulsing a penitent?"

"I shall not refuse to meet you," Lady Delia began.

"Then life will become worth living again!" he exclaimed.

"For Janet's sake—if you succeed in making your peace with her," said Lady Delia.

"I fancy," he returned, "that you have a wrong impression——"

"Here is my partner!" she cried, "and I shall say no more about it."

She took excellent care to avoid him during the rest of that evening, although she perceived that he was the handsomest man in the room. He appeared to be very popular, also, and if he had not acted so lamentably, Lady Delia would not have been unwilling to dance with him.

She had made up her mind to avoid Janet Waymark for the remainder of her days, but, nevertheless, she paid a visit to Park Lane early in the following week.

"You are nothing if not magnanimous," said Janet without much warmth of welcome. "How are your plays going along?" she asked presently.

"I wish we were going to stay in London," answered Lady Delia with a sigh.

"Why?"

"Oh, it is dreadful!" cried Lady Delia. "Will has invited Sir Francis Sargent to Wharfstead——"

"Is he coming?" asked Janet eagerly.

"It is very abominable of him," answered Lady Delia.

"You know that Lady Wharfstead invited me for Christmas week," said Janet.

"Of course, we are all delighted," cried Lady Delia.

Wharfstead House was to be quite full for Christmas, and Janet Waymark was the last guest to arrive. With regard to Sargent, Lady Delia found herself in an embarrassing position, since it seemed desirable that the daughter of the house should treat him with something approaching courtesy. On the one or two occasions of their meetings since Mrs. Prince's dance Lady Delia had ignored his presence as far as in her lay, but on the afternoon of his arrival at Wharfstead she happened to be alone in the drawing-room.

"I confess," he said, as she gave him her finger-tips, "that I have come with a guilty conscience."

"It would have been better to follow its dictates," she retorted.

"The question arose in my mind," he said.

"How could you hesitate about the answer?" cried Lady Delia.

"You must understand that another organ came into play," he returned.

"Oh, yes, of course," Lady Delia answered, "you know that Janet Waymark is coming."

Before Sargent could answer her brother entered the room, and,

meeting Lady Delia again after taking the guest to his chamber, Herick reproached her concerning her treatment of Sir Francis.

"Upon my word," he said, "I can't understand why you always give the chap the cold shoulder. He isn't a bit used to that sort of thing."

"I daresay he isn't," answered Lady Delia, with a crimson face.

On the following morning the men and some of the ladies went out after Lord Wharfstead's pheasants, whilst Lady Delia drove to meet them in her governess cart for luncheon. As Sargent said that he had twisted his foot, Lord Wharfstead suggested that he should be driven home by Lady Delia, who looked annoyed in consequence. The cart being small, and the pony smaller, it would have been cruel to the animal to include a third person.

"Sorry," said Lady Delia, as the pony trotted slowly homeward, "that you have met with such a serious accident."

"Oh, it's of no consequence," he returned.

"I didn't imagine it was," she exclaimed.

"The fact is that I am bound to speak to you," said Sargent.

"A little shabby to make an excuse," she suggested.

"All's fair in love——"

"I was forgetting," answered Lady Delia, "that Janet would arrive before the others returned. I beg your pardon, Sir Francis," she added, putting back her head.

"It was nothing," he mumbled.

"You certainly said something."

"Nothing you ought to have heard," he answered.

"By the bye," she continued, "I have heard it on your lips before."

"Lady Delia," he said.

"Well?"

"I am going to run the risk of mortally offending you."

"It is a day after the fair," she retorted.

"When I look back——"

"How hateful that you should be able to look back to that!" she exclaimed.

"It wasn't the pony's fault, you know," urged Sargent, as she lightly plied the whip. "When I remember that day——"

"I hope you feel as intensely ashamed as I do," she said.

"Do you?" he whispered, leaning forward in the cart.

She stared into his face for a moment.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"It's no use going in for subterfuge," he continued, "because it is my most pleasant——"

"You are insulting me!" cried Lady Delia.

"I told you," he answered, "that I ran the risk of mortally offending you. But I want to ask whether, when you look back——"

"I always avoid it," she insisted.

"Then when I remind you——"

"It ought to be the very last thing you could do."

"Yes, I know," he returned. "But the end sometimes justifies the means. I want to know whether—candidly—the recollection is wholly detestable?"

"It is absolutely and entirely hateful," answered Lady Delia, and he rubbed his ankle as if it pained him acutely, although it did not.

"I am sorry," he said quietly.

"Did you imagine it could be anything else?" she demanded.

"Oh, well, I hoped——"

"How strangely you must think of me!"

"As I have never thought of any other woman," he protested.

"That," said Lady Delia, "is fortunate for the others."

"Yes—perhaps," he admitted, and she looked straight at the pony's ears.

"A man who could insult a servant! Because," she continued hastily, "if you had known who I was, you would never have dared——"

"Not then," he answered.

"What do you mean?" she cried.

"Of course, I should have had to wait for the privilege," he said. "But——"

"There is Janet!" exclaimed Lady Delia, as they came within sight of the house and saw Miss Waymark and her maid in the act of alighting from Lord Wharfstead's black omnibus. The visitor was the most self-possessed of the group, and a few moments later they all went to Lady Wharfstead in the drawing-room.

After the house became at last quiet that night Lady Delia tapped at Janet's door.

"Had you been seeing much of Sir Francis before he came here?" she inquired, looking charming in her pale blue robe.

"Oh, pretty much," said Janet, with a shrug.

"He twisted his ankle this morning," Lady Delia continued, "and my father told me to drive him home."

"So you think I may be jealous!" cried Janet with a curious kind of laugh.

She was a woman with few illusions, and from the outset she recognized the only motives which could induce Sargent to ask her to marry him. But, in truth, the wish had been father to that thought, and without being passionately in love, she had arrived at the conclusion that Sir Francis would make a tolerable husband as things went. Although she was not broken-hearted when she saw the position of affairs at Wharfstead House, she became bitterly angry and vindictive.

Her vexation reached the maximum on the evening of the play, when

a number of persons from the neighborhood reinforced the house-party. The comedietta, which came first, was acted neither better nor worse than is usual with such things in similar circumstances, but it probably caused greater pleasure to the actors than to the audience.

Janet's seat afforded an uninterrupted view of Sargent, whose eyes, especially during the farce, scarcely left Lady Delia's face. It was true that she looked ravishing in the parlor-maid's dress, and when the play ended and the actors and actresses mingled with the other guests in their stage make-up, Sir Francis, leaning against the wall by the door, was by way of making himself conspicuous.

And Lady Delia, seeming to be aware of her power in this guise in which Sargent had first seen her, might be suspected of a tendency to exert it. Janet felt perplexed by the problem which Lady Delia presented, marvelling whether in truth the girl's wrath was as overwhelming as she had pretended. On the impulse of a moment Janet set forth in search of Herrick, a hot-tempered young man, unusually devoted to his sister.

"Intensely hot in here," she cried, resting a hand familiarly on his arm. "Can't we find some cooler air?" So he led her to a secluded corner of the hall. "By the bye," she added, "has Delia forgiven your friend, Sir Francis, yet?"

"What on earth has she to forgive?" demanded Herrick.

"Didn't she tell you?"

"I only know she usually treats the chap villainously," he answered, and at that moment they saw Lady Delia cross the other end of the hall and disappear into the billiard-room, to be followed a few seconds later by Sargent.

"Is that your notion of villainous treatment?" asked Janet, forcing a laugh.

"I never pretend to understand a woman," said Herrick.

"Well, it's a little hard in the present case," she rejoined. "If a man had insulted me in that way——"

"Insulted!" exclaimed Herrick quickly, and then Janet gave her own version of the affair.

In the meantime Sir Francis shut the door of the billiard-room.

"Now, this," he murmured, "is the very kindest thing you have done for me!" and he stood with one hand on the cushion of the billiard-table, gazing into her face.

"Only because of your importunity," said Lady Delia.

"Will you grant me anything if I am only importunate enough?" he asked.

"As much as you deserve," she retorted.

"Ah, but I don't imagine I deserve it," he continued. "I admit that I acted like a——"

"There is no need to revile yourself," she answered.

"But, upon my word," he said, "now I see you again as you looked that afternoon, I find it difficult to blame myself very severely."

"The woman tempted me!" said Lady Delia. "It is the old story."

"Why, yes," he urged, "if you will only let me tell it."

"How many editions have there been already?" she asked.

"It is the first," he answered.

"Janet," she suggested.

"I don't feel guilty in that case," he said. "My people wished me to——"

"Oh, I quite understand you," she cried, with a laugh.

"Then," he returned, "you must know that I love you——"

Sir Francis found it necessary to set a watch upon his tongue as the door of the billiard-room opened and Herrick entered with an ominous face. For a moment the three stood regarding each other in silence,—Lady Delia flushed and a little nervous, Sir Francis with a frown on his brow, Herrick obviously bent on mischief.

"I want a word with you, Sargent!" he exclaimed.

"Would it make much difference if you had it five minutes later?" asked Sir Francis, striving after patience.

"I should like to know what the devil you meant by——"

"Will!" said Lady Delia, "the play is over, you know."

"Sargent has acted like an infernal——"

"What did he do?" she demanded, drawing herself to her full height.

"Anyhow," said Will, more wrathful now with his sister than with his friend, "you don't seem much to mind it!"

"What?" demanded Lady Delia.

"Janet told me that Sargent had insulted you," cried Herrick, devoutly wishing he had not attempted to interfere.

"How very foolish of her," said Lady Delia.

"The first time you met——"

"Oh, no doubt," she answered, "F-Francis was a little precipitate."

"Look here, Herrick," exclaimed Sir Francis, suddenly reviving, "Delia is going to make the best of me. The fact is, she is going to be my wife!"

"Good Lord!" said Herrick, staring from the one to the other. "When did that come about?"

Lady Delia raised her eyes, and as they met Sargent's she smiled.

"When was it?" she faltered, and she lowered her eyes again.

"I think," he answered, "it was a foregone conclusion from the first," and as he drew nearer and took Lady Delia's hands, Herrick thought it discreet to withdraw.

Janet did not in the least enjoy his subsequent explanation.

"NEW-BORN BABE OF THE ROYAL PALACE"

BY SUSIE M. BEST

"NEW-BORN Babe of the Royal Palace,
Thine is a cradle carved of gold."
*"Keep thy speech, for I have a vision
Now of One in a manger cold."*

"New-born Babe of the Royal Palace,
Silk and satin and lace are thine."
*"Hush! for I see Another lying
Roughly housed with the common kine."*

"New-born Babe of the Royal Palace,
Lit are the lights in tower and hall."
*"Seest thou in the heavens yonder
One great star that is worth them all?"*

"New-born Babe of the Royal Palace,
Bells are clanging the news to earth."
*"Nay, not so! 'Tis a flight of angels
Choiring of a Saviour's birth."*

"New-born Babe of the Royal Palace,
Heir to a kingdom's crown art thou."
*"Yea, perchance—but I see a halo
Circling another Baby's brow."*

"New-born Babe of the Royal Palace,
Hark, the rejoicings loud for thee!"
*"Oh, miracle! 'tis a world acclaiming
Him who shall die upon a Tree."*

"New-born Babe of the Royal Palace,
Writ in the annals is thy name."
*"'Twill be forgot when the mangered Baby
Rises into a Saviour's fame."*

"New-born Babe of the Royal Palace,
All to thee must homage bring."
*"Fools and blind! I am but the creature—
He in the manger is the King!"*

THE LITTLEST BOY AND SANTA CLAUS

By Edwin L. Sabin

THE great hall clock, stationed opposite the foot of the stairs, struck two. From his bed above the Littlest Boy listened with a sense of awe. Never before had he heard it strike so late an hour. Once, indeed, he had heard it strike ten, but usually it had struck eight—and when next he was awake it was striking six and morning had come.

This was a very valuable clock, so the Littlest Boy had been given to understand. It was much taller than himself, and it had so much to say,—striking, as it did, every quarter hour,—and said it in such measured, solemn tones, that he always paid it profound respect.

Now there it was, evidently sleepless, even in the middle of the night keeping watch upon the household affairs!

The Littlest Boy lay and listened. The house was impressively still. The only sounds audible were the stately ticking of the monitor clock below, and the regular breathing of the Biggest Boy and the Biggest Girl in the room adjoining.

The Littlest Boy's eyes were wide open and gazing into the velvet blackness close above his face. When he had gone to bed it had been Christmas Eve. He was not fully certain as to the line of demarkation, but it occurred to him that now it was Christmas Day! Then he began to blink and think.

He wondered if Santa Claus had come yet. Before the grate-fire, down in the library, were ranged three chairs: a rocking-chair for the Biggest Girl, a straight-backed, ordinary chair for the Biggest Boy, and a huge, roomy arm-chair for himself. In addition, he had hung up his stockings to the mantel.

The Littlest Boy considered this quite a clever idea. He hoped that Santa Claus would appreciate the conveniences offered: the chair into which to dump the bulky articles, and the stockings into which to stuff the smaller ones.

He tried to picture to himself how, if Santa Claus had been and gone, that chair and those stockings must look. At intervals, as some particularly alluring fancy stood out before him, he gave an ecstatic wriggle and a few blinks extra.

Oh, the red wagon! And the silver napkin-ring! Supposing he got them both! It did not seem to him possible that he could exist without either, and yet—and yet—he mustn't exact too much.

If he might take one peep into the library,—just one tiny peep,—to find out whether or not Santa Claus had been.

He felt that he ought not to yield to this temptation; and he sighed hard and twisted. But even in the midst of his struggle he did yield, for first his disobedient right foot stole from beneath the blue coverlet, and next his disobedient left foot; and in a moment all of him, enveloped in his long, pink-flannel night-gown, was moving resolutely towards the door-way.

He shuffled to the head of the stairs, and descended to the midway landing under the colored glass window. The stairs, of polished oak, were smooth and cold to his soles, but he did not mind, because often had he, thus apparelled, traversed and retraversed them in the process of going to bed.

At the landing the stairs turned sharply. The Littlest Boy also turned with them to continue his journey. Now there ahead of him was the monitor clock, staring him in the face, and ticking loud reproof. From the library, off the hall, came the reminiscent glow of the grate-fire with which the Christmas Eve had been celebrated.

Down sped the Littlest Boy, boldly ignoring the astounded clock, down the remaining flight, and across the square hall, whose rugs were soft and comforting. On the threshold of the library he stopped short, frightened at what he had done.

He had caught Santa Claus!

Aye, there was Santa Claus, bending over the big chair, which, the Littlest Boy glimpsed, was overflowing with packages and things.

I do not know but that the Littlest Boy would have beat courteous retreat (although, of course, his farther curiosity was simply tremendous) had not Santa Claus suddenly glanced up and descried him—a small, pink figure, made still pinker by the glowing coals, framed, wide-eyed, in the library door-case.

"Hello!" said Santa Claus softly, not moving.

"Hello!" responded the Littlest Boy. "I didn't know you were here."

"Didn't you?" remarked Santa Claus, straightening up and slowly stepping backward.

"No," assured the Littlest Boy. "Did you get in through the chimbley?"

During his whole life—that is, ever since he could talk—the Littlest Boy had been trying to say "chimney;" but, somehow, that "l," being so slim and hatchet-faced, always nimbly slipped in and elbowed out the "n."

"Did I get in through the chimbley?" repeated Santa Claus; and then he opened his mouth in a silent laugh. "Yes, I clumb down the chimbley," he said.

"I s'pose it was the sitting-room one, then," hazarded the Littlest Boy. "The fire in this one would have burned you—wouldn't it?"

"Sure; it was the settin'-room chimbley," affirmed Santa Claus, with more of his silent laugh.

The Littlest Boy noted that Santa Claus, also, seemed to have trouble with that word.

"You say 'chimbley' and I say 'chimley,' but my father says—says ch—ch—chimneley is right," informed the Littlest Boy.

"You don't mean it!" returned Santa Claus, who, having backed to the window looking upon the side porch, now, with his hand behind him, was deftly sliding it up.

"Please don't go, Santa Claus," besought the Littlest Boy. "We'll talk real low, so nobody 'll hear. That is, if you're not in too big a hurry to stay," he added politely.

"Well, I've got a lot of places to ten' to yet to-night," replied Santa Claus. "But seein' you're so anxious I'll stay a bit, with this here winder open a mite so's for to make wentilation."

"When you go, I wish you'd let me see you go up the chimley," announced the Littlest Boy cautiously, so that the Biggest Boy and the Biggest Girl over their heads might not be disturbed. "Or is it too hard?"

"It's kinder hard," acknowledged Santa Claus. He had seated himself on the broad sill. "I prefer the winder."

"But how do you get on the roof again, where the reindeers are?" queried the Littlest Boy.

"I don't use no reindeers any more," replied Santa Claus. "I come in a balloon, an' I climb up the rope,—see?"

"Oh!" said the Littlest Boy.

He had been advancing, step by step, into the room.

"Where's your whiskers?" he asked, now able to obtain a clearer view of the visitor.

"I got 'em burnt off in a red-hot chimbley," answered Santa Claus.

"Oh!" again said the Littlest Boy.

He was very sorry for Santa; it must have hurt him terribly. But he was disappointed too. Santa Claus without whiskers, and in a slouch hat, fell somewhat short of the Littlest Boy's ideal.

"Is that your sack?" he inquired, indicating a limp bag that was resting on the sill beside Santa.

"Sure," responded Santa Claus.

"It's almost empty, isn't it!" asserted the Littlest Boy. "But I s'pose you've lots more up in the balloon. Had you got all through with me? My chair is the middle one, there. And those are my stockings, in front of it."

"Well, I was kinder foolin' round when you came in," confessed

Santa Claus; "but I reckon I'm through. Them other chairs are your ma's an' pa's, I take it?"

"Yes; mamma's is the rocker and papa's is the other," informed the Littlest Boy hurriedly. "Did you bring me a red wagon and a silver napkin-ring?"

"Aren't they there?" queried Santa Claus.

"May I look?" asked the Littlest Boy eagerly.

"Sure," granted Santa Claus, with his favorite word

The Littlest Boy was not slow in taking advantage of that permission. In a twinkling he was at the chair, and, oblivious to the rustling that he was producing, was burrowing amidst its contents.

He did not have to burrow to find the red wagon. Its two front wheels were sticking straight up against the chair's back!

"Oooo-ee!" jubilated the Littlest Boy, turning with sparkling eyes. "Will its sides fold over?"

"You bet!" assured Santa Claus.

"Just bushels and bushels of thanks, Santa Claus," purled the Littlest Boy rapturously. "I hope it's bigger than my Cousin James's is! Is it?"

"Sure!" said Santa Claus. "Now how about the ring? Ain't that there?"

"I don't see it," replied the Littlest Boy, rummaging.

"Mebbe it's in the stockin's," suggested Santa Claus.

And it was!—a beautiful, shiny, silver napkin-ring, all done up in tissue-paper!

"Oooooo-eee!" gurgled the Littlest Boy, unwrapping it. "I bet it's the very solides' kind!"

"Lemme see," demanded Santa Claus. "That's what I intended it to be, anyhow, an' I hope I ain't made no mistake."

"Yes, it's solid, all right enough," he said, weighing it in his hand, while the Littlest Boy watched him anxiously. "But don't you think that that there wagon an' this here ring, both together, are too much for a kid like you?"

"I don't know," responded the Littlest Boy, abashed. "I've tried to be awful good. I've picked up kindlin' and went on errands and brushed my teeth—and—and gone down cellar after dark, and—and—and I've hardly ever cried when I got hurt!"

"Still, seems to me," persisted Santa Claus, gazing at the shiny ring in his fingers, "that a wagon alone is enough for one kid, besides all them other things you've got in yon chair an' socks. I dunno but what I'll take this an' give it som'ers else."

"Well," agreed the Littlest Boy gravely, "if—if you can find some little boy who ought to have it more'n me, then you can—can take it; and p'raps next Christmas——"

"God!" roared the Biggest Boy, like an angry lion, leaping through the library door-way.

With a slam, up sped the window; with an oath, out whirled Santa Claus!

"You've scared Santa Claus! You've scared Santa Claus!" wailed the Littlest Boy in despair.

"I have, have I!" exclaimed the Biggest Boy, gathering the wailer into his arms.

"And he took my ring," farther lamented the Littlest Boy.

"He did, did he!" repeated the lion—that is, the Biggest Boy—in a commiserating growl. "Never mind; we'll get another."

"But I told him he might, if there's some other little boy who'd ought to have it more," explained the Littlest Boy truthfully. "Maybe he'll bring me one next Christmas."

Here the Biggest Boy shut the treacherous window; and with the Biggest Girl, who by this time had arrived and was hugging and kissing the Littlest Boy's two rosy feet, as they hung down inside the Biggest Boy's arms, close accompanying, carried him upstairs to bed.

What do you think! Evidently Santa Claus repented, or else he had only been joking, or else he could find no other little boy who was more worthy; for, after all, at daylight there was discovered, lying on the mat before the side-door, that very same ring,—wrapped, it is true, not in fine white tissue, but in coarse brown paper.

However, upon the paper was scrawled, in ragged but unmistakable lines:

"for the kid
SANTY CLAWS"



LEAVES

BY AGNES LEE

LITTLE dead leaves, little dead leaves,
Thronging about my door;
When the summer wanes and the autumn cleaves,
I have seen ye oft before!

We are little dead hands, little dead hands,
Tapping thy walls around;
Living, we hid the sky's blue lands,
But now we hide the ground.

Little dead hands, beckoning me
Forth from a fire's red glow,
If ye will tell me whither beck ye,
I will open my door and go.

A VOLUNTARY EXILE

By Jennette Lee

Author of "The Son of a Fiddler," "A Pillar of Salt," etc.



THE afternoon sun poured down with scorching heat. A little, old woman, bending over the stone wall, glanced up impatiently. She dropped the large, flat stone that she had lifted from its place, and, feeling in the silk bag hanging at her side, drew out a spotless handkerchief, with which she wiped her face.

"Turrible hot," she murmured. "'Seems's if it got hotter'n' hotter every year."

She replaced the handkerchief in the bag, and lifting the stone once more, carried it laboriously across the open yard to the straight path that ran from the door to the road. She dropped it with a sigh in the path and straightened her back stiffly.

"There," she said, "that makes ten."

She glanced at them complacently.

"It'll be one good, smooth place to walk on," she murmured. "The old wall wa'n't good for anything anyway."

She looked towards the low, tumble-down wall, beyond which an orchard shimmered in the hot light. Beyond the orchard the ground dipped sharply into a hollow. A road curved from this hollow and ran along in front of the house. As the old woman stood looking towards the orchard, a head rose over the hill facing towards the house. It was large and round and fair and rested on a pair of plump shoulders.

The old woman peered at it sharply. "Melissy," she said, under her breath. "Well, I'm glad to see a livin' soul."

She started down the path at a brisk trot, the black bag swinging at her side. "How-de-do, Melissy?"

The young woman smiled—a round, slow, placid smile. "How-de-do, Aunt Nancy?" She came leisurely up the long path, fanning herself with her sun-hat, which she had removed. She glanced down at the stones in the path and then at the old woman's flushed face. "What you been doin', Aunt Nancy?" she asked.

"Makin' a walk." The tone had a shade of defiance.

"Makin' a walk!"

The old woman nodded. "It'll be one good, smooth place to walk on 'fore I die," she said.

Melissa's smile deepened, like a growing moon. "Why, Aunt Nancy!" she said with mild wonder.

The old woman led the way into the house. She drew forward a big chair to one of the shaded front windows and pushed up the curtain a little.

"Set down and get cooled off," she said. "I'll get you a drink."

She bustled away and presently returned, bringing a glass of water. A faint, cool mist clouded the outside of the glass.

Melissa took a long, restful draught. "You *do* have good water, Aunt Nancy," she said, handing back the glass. She settled back comfortably in the chair.

Aunt Nancy took the glass in silence. She carried it to the table across the room. "It's all down hill," she said bitterly as she faced about.

"What is?" said Melissa with a start. She had been looking into the syringa-bush outside the window.

"The path," replied Aunt Nancy.

Melissa's eyes sought the long, straight walk leading to the road. "I don't see's 'tis," she said. "It looks pretty level from here."

"I don't mean that one; that's all right,"—the old woman looked out at it approvingly,—*"I mean the one to the well."*

"Oh!" Melissa's mouth remained open.

Aunt Nancy's was closed firmly. "The' ain't a place on the farm you can walk on that's level ground," she said at last, opening her lips a crack.

"I don't know's the' is," responded Melissa slowly, "but I like it." She looked out of the window contentedly. The blue hills that rose in the distance showed through a gap in the nearer ones.

"Well, I don't." The old mouth took on a grim look. "I've lived here goin' on sixty-two year now, and I've done nothin' but go up an' down hill all my life. I'd like a little smooth goin' 'fore I die."

"Why, Aunt Nancy,"—the younger woman laughed with a sweet, fresh sound,—*"I didn't know's you felt that way."*

"Well, I do." The old mouth trembled a little. "I've al'ays felt so. Nobody's known. John never knew. I thought mebbe he would. But he didn't." She glanced across to the opposite hill, where lines of white shone among the trees.

Melissa rocked for a moment in silence. "I'd go down to the Plain on a visit if I was you," she said at last.

"I'm goin', but it won't be no visit,—I'm a-goin' to stay—for good an' all." The words came slowly, as if a plan were forming itself.

Melissa gave a little start. She looked about the room. "What'll you do with the things?" she asked.

"Sell 'em."

"Everything?"

The old woman nodded. "I'm tired of 'em, I tell ye. I want level goin' an' new things to look at an' think about 'fore I die. I'm goin' to have patent spring rockers 'stead o' these old slat chairs, an' a clock with chimes 'stead o' that,"—she motioned towards the tall clock across the room,—“an' new dishes, the latest patterns,—like them down to the tea-store,—an' Brussels carpet an' a chenille table-cover an' a furnace fire an' a refrigerator box an'—gas, maybe.” She stopped, a little breathless.

Melissa looked impressed and thoughtful. "I wonder if you'll like it?" she said slowly. "Don't seem's if you would." She looked around the big, cool room, with its shining furniture, its quaint rag carpet, and the old clock ticking off the sleepy afternoon.

It ticked through a long silence.

Aunt Nancy broke it. "I'm going to advertise in the *Gazette* right off," she said with an air of decision. "I declare, I wonder I never thought of it before. I b'lieve you put it into my head."

Melissa shook her head, smiling a little. "It's somethin' I shouldn't ever have thought of," she said. She waited a minute. "If you're goin' to sell, why can't you sell to Abner'n' me?" She spoke with a little hesitation, as if fearing to take advantage of her aunt's foolishness.

The old woman stared at her. "Why, I can!" A light broke over her face. "I declare! Seem's if it was Providence," she said wonderingly. "It's just the place for you'n' Abner. You'll like it an' I can go where I want to." She drew a deep breath of satisfaction.

Melissa shook her head again. "It don't seem's if we ought to let you do it," she said doubtfully.

"You tell Abner to come up an' see me this evening," was Aunt Nancy's response.

She stood in the door-way and watched her niece go down the long path. "I guess I won't finish pavin' it to-day," she called gayly after her. "You'n' Abner don't hanker after pavements the way I do."

Melissa looked back, with her slow smile. "We like it just as 'tis," she said placidly.

II.

"COME right in, Abner." Aunt Nancy looked up, smiling and elated.

The young man standing in the door-way paused, looking at her doubtfully. He was tall and thin, and the indecisive beard that strayed around his chin gave him an air of youthfulness. "How are you feelin' to-night, Aunt Nancy?" he asked.

She laughed briskly. "I'm feelin' all right, Abner. Come right in an' set down. You needn't be afraid I'm goin' out of my mind."

The young man smiled feebly. He crossed the room and seated himself in a straight-backed chair, his hat balanced on his knees. "Melissy said you was thinkin' some of sellin'," he said hesitatingly, glancing about the room.

She nodded. "Yes, I'm goin' to sell."

The young man raised his hand to his chin. He rubbed it thoughtfully. "Don't seem's if we ought to let you," he said.

She gave him a sharp glance and settled back in her chair. "Now, Abner Suncook, don't you bother your head about me, my time o' life!" She looked him over again. "I've spanked you a good many times, hain't I, Abner?" she asked, regarding him over the top of her spectacles.

He nodded his head. A smile came slowly into his light-blue eyes.

It was reflected in the black ones peering over the spectacles. "I guess I'm old enough to know what I'm about. I've been thinkin' it over since Melissy was here this afternoon, an' it's all pretty clear in my mind."

She waited for a moment, looking thoughtfully at the old clock. Then she shook her head with a little sigh.

"Your father was a Suncook," she said, turning the black eyes on him once more, "an' I'm a Suncook, born an' bred, an' I've lived in this house sixty-two year,—come next March,—an' it's long enough. My husband died here, an' my children was all born an' died here. I've closed a good many dead eyes in this house, first an' last,—an' put pennies on 'em," she said reflectively.

The young man stirred uneasily.

"I s'pose I ought to want to die here myself," she went on slowly, "but I don't—not yet. There's a spirit in me. I want to see some-thin' besides the everlastin' hills before I go." She looked at him sharply. "You don't know much about that feelin', do you, Abner?"

He shook his head. "I dunno's I do," he responded. "I'm pretty contented up here in the hills—with Melissy and all."

She nodded assent. "Yes, you're a Suncook. They're all that way—lovin' the hills. I took more after mother's side. She was a Poppleton. They liked level goin'. Three of 'em ran away to sea." She smiled grimly.

"The house would be yours sometime anyway," she went on after a moment. "I'm going to sell it to you cheap, an' on easy terms. I've got enough to live on,—John looked out for that." She rocked placidly back and forth for a minute.

Abner opened his lips to speak, but she stopped him with a little gesture. A look, half of shame and half of amusement, had crept into her face.

"I might's well tell you, Abner," she said with a grim smile. "I

hain't told a livin' soul. But you're a Suncook, same as me, an' I feel as if I'd got to tell somebody."

"What is it?" asked Abner. He moved forward in his chair.

She looked at him shrewdly. "You won't tell nobody?" she said.

He shook his head.

"Well, the first thing I'm goin' to have when I get down off the hills is an—autymobile."

She leaned back, triumphant.

Abner's eyes bulged feebly. He shifted them uneasily to the clock and then to the floor.

Aunt Nancy laughed happily. "Now you think I'm out of my head, don't you, Abner?"

He looked at her with sheepish guilt.

"But I ain't. I never was quite so sane in all my life. I've al'ays wanted, ever since I was born, to ride somethin' that went by itself. I've pulled horses up an' down these hills till I'm sick to death of it. I've al'ays set far forred on the seat an' breathed light so's not to weigh so much, an' I want to ride in somethin' I can lean back in an' weigh heavy 'fore I die—somethin' that I won't have to think all the time how tired it's gettin'." She nodded emphatically.

Abner snickered. "Seems kinder queer," he said safely.

"I s'pose it does. I don't see's other folks feel that way. I've watched 'em a good many times comin' up the orchard hill, an' they all lean back an' take it comf'table—the fat ones most of any," she added reflectively.

Abner smiled. "You could have your automobile up here," he ventured after a pause.

She shook her head. "'Twouldn't be it. Folks'd be running to the windows to talk, an' lookin' out an' sayin' I was crazy an' ought to be shut up. I'd rather pull horses till I die'n do that." She looked at him rebelliously.

Abner made no reply. He could think of none—no safe one.

Aunt Nancy continued to regard him shrewdly. "It use' to be a bicycle I wanted," she said slowly.

Abner started, and she laughed.

"I wanted one, first time I ever saw 'em," she went on. "It was one of them high ones with a little wheel in front, I saw it at a fair over to Charlemont. That must 'a' been thirty years ago an' more."

She sat lost in thought.

Abner eyed her cautiously.

"Women didn't ride 'em," she said, rousing herself. "I s'pose anybody'd thought I was crazy, sure, if I'd said I wanted to. I never told anyone. I remember, drivin' home that night, John said what foolish things they was. I didn't say anything." She sighed reminiscently.

"When I saw the new kind—an' women ridin' 'em—it did seem's if I couldn't wait any longer. That was twelve years ago, pretty near." She sighed again.

"An' now I see by the papers they don't use 'em so much. They're goin' by an' autymobiles is all the rage. If I don't get down pretty quick, I won't ever have a chance." She looked at him half pleadingly.

He stood up with an air of decision. "Well, Aunt Nancy, I don't understand how you feel," he said gently, "but I don't believe you're out of your head. And if you want Melissy an' me to take the house an' keep it for you, we'll do it. An' you can have it back on the same terms when you get tired of livin' down there an' want to come back to the hills."

"I sha'n't ever want to come back," she said simply, "not as long as I can have an autymobile an' ride in it down there."

III.

"How's she feelin', Abner?"

Melissa was sitting before the big open fireplace, rocking gently back and forth and patting a long, white bundle that rested on her knees.

Abner came across to the fireplace and peered cautiously down at the bundle. "She asleep?" he whispered.

Melissa nodded proudly. She kept on patting the long, white clothes with slow, soft touch as she looked up at him. "How'd you find Aunt Nancy?" she asked again.

Abner looked thoughtfully into the fire. "She's doin' all right, I guess," he said slowly.

"I suppose her new things are pretty nice?" suggested Melissa. There was a mild curiosity in the round eyes.

"Yes, they're pretty nice, I guess,"—Abner's eyes travelled slowly around the big room,—“but they can't hold a candle to these—not 'cordin' to my notion.” His glance came back and rested contentedly on the white bundle.

Melissa smiled. "What sort of things are they?" she asked.

Abner reflected a moment. A smile crept into his face. "The only thing I seem to remember, for certain, is a big hanging lamp—as big around as the candle stand over there; an' it's got dangling glasses, all colors, hangin' to it."

Melissa's round eyes grew rounder. "Is it pretty?" she asked.

"Well, it's strikin'," said Abner guardedly. "Yes, she's got everything she said she'd have," he added after a moment, "Brussels carpet, an' patent rocker, an' the door-bell goes by 'lectricity, an' a nickel teapot."

Melissa sighed gently. "Is she happy, do you s'pose, Abner?" she asked.

Abner broke into a big laugh. "Happy!—You just ought to see her!" He chuckled. "I never saw anything like it. She's a new woman, I tell you. I didn't suppose it was in her. She goes chippering around and smiling. She's doin' something the whole, blessed time—a female missionary or a bargain sale or a church fair or something. I didn't see her more'n five minutes 't a time while I was there. She's got some kind of a new thing for her hair," he added thoughtfully. "It makes her look different—younger, I guess."

"What is it like?" Melissa leaned forward.

"Well, it kind o' stands up on the top an' comes out somewhere——"

"Is it black?"

He stared at her vaguely. "Well, I ain't quite sure," he said slowly.

"It's a cap, maybe," suggested Melissa.

He shook his head decisively. "No, it ain't a cap. I know a cap when I see it, I guess. It's a different kind of structure."

Melissa leaned back with a soft, impatient sigh.

Abner looked at her apologetically. "'Tain't so easy's you think to tell about them things—specially this one o' Aunt Nancy's." He gave a soft chuckle.

Melissa smiled. "Mebbe it's a rossette," she said.

Abner looked relieved. "I guess 'tis. That's a good name—a russette."

"But you ain't sure, Abner?"

"No, I ain't sure."

There was silence. The old clock ticked loudly. The baby stretched out her small fingers and gave a sleepy wail.

Melissa set her upright and trotted her. "D' she ask about the baby?" she asked.

"Land, yes! She couldn't hear enough about her. She says maybe she'll come up an' make us a visit when snow comes—so's she can't use her automobile any longer."

Melissa's clutch on the white clothes tightened. "When—she can't—use her—automobile?" she repeated slowly.

Abner nodded. "She's got one. Goes out ridin' every day."

Melissa looked at him reproachfully. "How'd she ever learn?" she asked after a pause.

"Hired a man to run it for her awhile. Oh, she wa'n't no time. She's always wanted to—to do somethin' of the sort," said Abner discreetly.

The puckers faded from Melissa's forehead. "D' you go ridin' in it?" she asked with returning interest.

Abner paused. "Well, I went once," he said guardedly.

"Didn't you like it?"

"She drives middlin' fast."

Melissa nodded. "I should know she would. I can see her now." She straightened the baby's clothes and shook her gently.

"You have to set up kind o' straight," said Abner reflectively, "with nothin' to do—and look as if you didn't know folks was starin' from the sidewalks. It's kinder hard work."

"Don't Aunt Nancy mind?" asked Melissa wonderingly.

"Mind? She don't see 'em—or know it. She's so busy turnin' the crank an' enjoyin' herself she can't see anything. Has to look out for corners too," he added. "We went round corners—most of 'em—on two wheels."

Melissa shuddered. "I shouldn't think it'd be safe."

"Yes, it's safe, I guess,—for her. Other folks have to step lively." He chuckled. "One day when she was goin' pretty fast an' a policeman happened to see her she was taken up——" He stopped suddenly. There were some things it was just as well not to tell Melissa—and the baby.

"What'd you say?" demanded Melissa breathlessly.

"I said she was so taken up with the thing she never saw him. She's having a terrible good time," added Abner, switching the conversation back to the safe track.

"I don't see how she can," murmured Melissa. She raised her eyes doubtfully. "You don't s'pose she's out of her head, do you, Abner?"

He laughed cheerfully. "Not a mite. She's havin' the first good time of her life."

Melissa gave a faint sniff. Her mild face grew almost stern. "I shouldn't think 'twould be a very good time without any folks or Baby." She patted the bundle.

"She says it's a good deal like the New Jerusalem," responded Abner gravely. "There's a river flowing through it, you know, and it's level an' good wheelin'. And it's a city, so there's folks around to talk to an' look at."

Melissa looked down at the baby. Her eyes softened. "Poor Aunt Nancy. I don't s'pose we ever knew how she missed 'em," she said softly.

IV.

"ARE they comin', Abner?" Melissa looked up anxiously. Her round, placid face was tear-stained.

Abner stamped the snow from his boots. "They're on the way with her," he said slowly, drawing off his mittens. "I come on ahead to tell you, so's to have things ready."

"They're all ready. I've been keepin' 'em hot all the morning, ever since I got the word. Was she much hurt, Abner?"

Abner looked out of the window. He cleared his throat. Then he nodded without speaking.

Melissa's face grew awed. "Don't seem's if they ought to bring her way up here—in this snow." She glanced at the cold window. "It'll, likely, kill her."

"The doctor says nothin' will hurt her now," said Abner gruffly.

"Is she so bad?"

He nodded again without speaking.

Melissa sighed softly. "Poor Aunt Nancy! How'd it happen, Abner?"

"She got thrown out of her automobile—run' into somethin' and upset."

"Her automobile! In the snow!"

"There ain't any snow down on the plain. She's been ridin' every day, right along. She was possessed about it,—wore a sweater, you know, an' thick things."

Melissa shook her head. "I can't seem to understand it, Abner—her actin' so."

"I can. She was a kind of child. I never see a child so tickled over anything as she was over that carriage thing when I was down there. She'd waited a good many years."

Melissa glanced hurriedly at the window. "They're coming," she said. "I must put in the other soapstone." She moved away to the bedroom, her eyes filling with quick tears.

When the slow procession came up the long, straight walk she was waiting at the door with a smiling face.

A pair of black eyes looked up from the bundled figure on the stretcher.

Melissa bent over it tenderly.

"How-de-do, Melissy?" The muffled voice came faintly out of the wrappings. "It ain't very level goin' up here."

Melissa's mouth quivered, but her eyes smiled. "It's pretty hilly, isn't it, Aunt Nancy?" She spoke in a loud voice, as if to a deaf person. "Bring her in this way," she said to the men, lowering her voice.

They stamped the snow from their feet and crossed the sitting-room to the bedroom door.

The keen, black eyes from their wrappings darted at each familiar object as they passed.

Half an hour later, propped up in the big four-poster, Aunt Nancy beamed cheerfully upon the room.

"Looks pretty comfortable, don't it?" she said.

Melissa nodded.

Aunt Nancy looked at her sharply. The black eyes twinkled. "Now, don't you feel bad, Melissy Suncook," she said quaintly, "I'm

going to have a real comfortable dying, I guess. I always did think I should like this bed to die in."

Melissa looked at her with a little awe. "Don't you feel any pain, Aunt Nancy?" she asked.

"Not a mite. I'm paralyzed up to here." There was an accent of pride in her voice as she laid her wrinkled hand on her heart.

"'Twon't be many days, the doctor says. The hills look real good, don't they." Her glance strayed to the window, where the mountains rose, blue and hazy, in the soft light. Her eyes dwelt on them with a look of content. "There ain't anything in the world just like 'em, is there?" she said gently, "but they do make it dreadful hard goin'—'specially for horses. You didn't expect I'd be coming up here like this?" She turned quickly to look at her niece.

Melissa shook her head.

"I al'ays knew I should come back," said Aunt Nancy. "I knew I'd come back—if I could get here—to die. I wanted to go to sleep in the hills. They're a good place to sleep." She smiled faintly.

She turned her face to the pillow with a sigh. "I guess I'll take a nap," she said slowly. "When I wake up you can bring the baby in to see me—I always did—love babies—and folks."

THANKSGIVING

BY J. HAMMOND BROWN

INSIDE, the grand church organ pealed
And sweet-voiced choir-boys sang;
Broadcloth and Satin lolled at ease,
While belfry music rang.

Outside, the wind'blew bitter cold,
A lonely street-waif stood
Hard by the door, with wondering eyes,
In need of clothes and food.

The preacher in his robes of white
Gave thanks in long-drawn prayer;
Broadcloth and Satin bowed their heads—
Gave thanks, each, for his share.

The little stranger out-of-doors
In garments soiled and rent,
Passed on into the great, wide world,
And wondered what it meant.

